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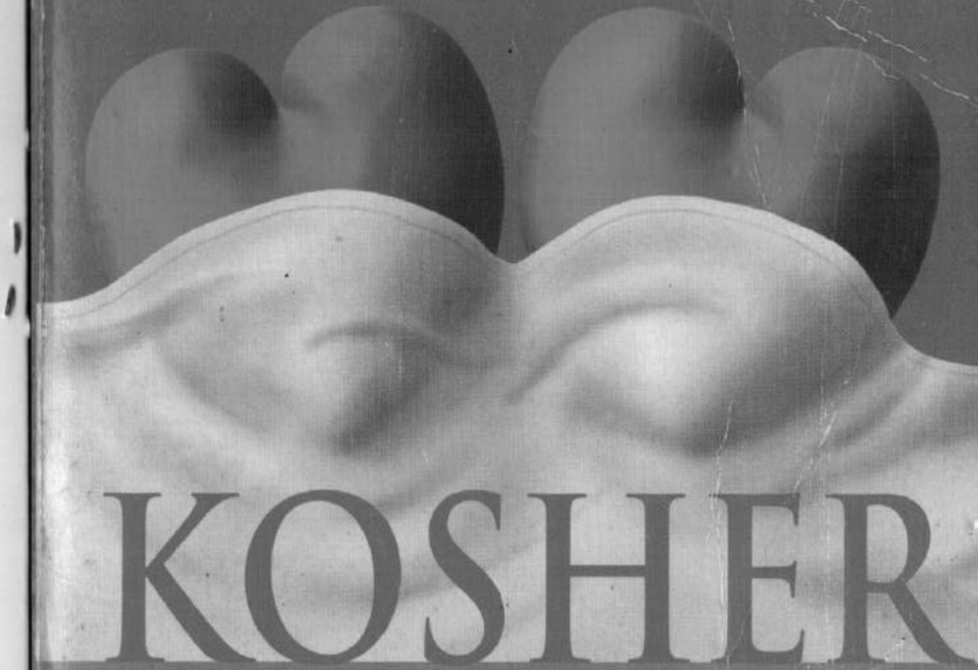

# KOSHER SEX

## A RECIPE FOR PASSION AND INTIMACY

**SHMULEY BOTEACH**

**Author of Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments**

**Other books by this author:**

*Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments*
(Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1999)

*Dreams*
(Bash Publications Inc., 1991)

*An Intelligent Person's Guide to Judaism*
(Duckworth, 1999)

*The Jewish Guide to Adultery:*
*How to turn your marriage into a delicious affair*
(New edition:
Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1999)

*Moses of Oxford:*
*A Jewish vision of a university and its life,*
volumes 1 and 2
(André Deutsch Publishers Ltd, 1994)

*Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge*
(Jason Aronson Inc., 1996)

*The Wolf Shall Lie with the Lamb*
(Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993)

*Wrestling with the Divine:*
*A Jewish response to suffering*
(Jason Aronson Inc., 1995)

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## A RECIPE FOR PASSION AND INTIMACY

**SHMULEY BOTEACH**

הספר הזה לי
משה קנוט
כ"ה בשבט ה'תשע"ט
במסייאו

Est mihi hic liber
Húdson Canuto:
Pridie Kal. Febr. MMXIX
In urbe Maceioensi

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To my siblings
Sara, Bar Kochva, Chaim Moishe, and Ateret
whose love sustained me through our
parents' turbulent marriage
and divorce.

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# Acknowledgements

The world just can't seem to get enough of Kosher Sex. Even President Clinton was recently quoted as saying from the White House Rose Garden, 'For some, *Kosher Sex* is just a book. But for me it is a way of life.' Jews, non-Jews, Muslims, atheists, chiropractors and especially contortionists, they're all having kosher sex. One of my Christian friends wrote me a letter saying that at first he was reluctant to practise kosher sex since he is not circumcised. But having tried it, he now agrees that kosher sex is a cut above.

And oh how the world has changed since this book, second in importance only to the Bible itself, saw the light of day. Can anyone here still remember what the earth was like before the advent of *Kosher Sex*? No, the mere memory is too horrible to contemplate. Before its original publication, lawlessness and wars pervaded the earth and there was none to keep the peace. But along with its publication was the simultaneous emergence of that great champion of relationships, that great missionary of marriage, that great demoniser of divorce, that sublime healer of hearts, Rabbi Dr Shmuley Love, aka, me, yours truly.

I am therefore very happy and proud to present this newly revised edition of *Kosher Sex*, and I am extremely thankful to Judith Longman and Charles Nettleton, my publishers at Hodder and Stoughton, for having the genius and foresight to perceive just how bereft the world would have been without it. Charles is so taken with *Kosher Sex* that he hasn't been seen at the office for well over six months, and rumour has it that he hasn't left the family bedroom in all that time. Judith, in turn, has had her life completely transformed by *Kosher Sex*. She has now left publishing to enter politics. Having dyed her hair purple, acquired a huge bronze nose ring, and added a tattoo to her back that says 'You Tarzan, me Judith', she is now running for Prime Minister with the slogan 'Make kosher love, not war'. I know she has my vote.

Many of you have heard or read reports that some of my Rabbinical colleagues were opposed to or even attacked me for authoring *Kosher Sex*. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, so enamoured were all my Rabbinical colleagues with *Kosher Sex* that they all chipped in and arranged various important book-signings. Why, in the next three weeks alone I shall be touring and lecturing in Baghdad, Damascus, and Tripoli, all at their expense! Which just proves what united Rabbinical support lies behind *Kosher Sex*.

In my previous books, I have always thanked my wife last, in the spirit of saving the best for last. But any wife who endures a Rabbi husband who spends a year writing a book about sex deserves to be thanked first. Of course, since the publication of *Kosher Sex*, my wife Debbie has become a Muslim and changed her name to Debbie Mustafa Muhammad, and walks around in full hijab that even covers her face, so that no one can ever recognise her. Still, I do want to thank my extraordinary wife for all her devotion and support. Of course, there was the time last year when she yelled at the top of her lungs, 'I've had it with you, I should have listened to my mother. Johnny, who I dated before you, is now a plumber earning three times your salary, and Ernie and Bert, both of whom I dated simultaneously, now work on TV for *Sesame Street*. Even your stupid books don't sell!' So Debbie, wherever you are, thanks for leaving some cold meatballs in the freezer. They're still keeping me going.

My mother was also scandalised by her Rabbi son writing a book with this title. So I convinced her that she had misheard, and that the real title of the book was *Kosher Sax*, and concerns itself with the relationship between President Bill Clinton and the American Jewish community. So now she is proudly distributing the book to all her closest friends, telling them that her son is a political theorist. This has still not stopped them, unfortunately, from severing all ties with her ('There goes the mother of that strange Rabbi. Quick, let's cross to the other side').

Likewise, I would like to thank my six children for all being so well-behaved while this book was written, affording me some peace and quiet to get on with the job. Knowing that Daddy (or, as they call me, Odd Stranger) needed some silent time, they reduced their warring and fighting to 60 times per day (from a summer high of 190) and only interrupted me when the quarrels became really serious – like when baby Shaina was being used as a club by her brother Mendy to clobber older sister Chana into submission. I could have lived with that. But when he picked up my cherished laptop and threw it at his sister, that was just going a bit too far! The poor thing could have broken its modem.

Penny Phillips had the courageous task of re-editing the original *Kosher Sex* book (published by Duckworth) for this Hodder edition. Penny is a fabulous editor and very happily married. Which is why I was so confused when she offered to skip the editing and instead do all the practical field research for the *Kosher Sex* book. When I told her that there was no point, seeing that the book had already been published, she said, 'Well, there is going to be a sequel, isn't there? You need tons of new experiences, er, I mean material for the sequel, don't you?'

The original editing job was performed by Martin Rynja. I really want to express my appreciation to Martin for actually allowing some of my original manuscript – however small a fraction – into the final, published version. Martin referred to his having cut out nine-tenths of the manuscript as a 'vast improvement over the original'. But my revenge against Martin should come from the readers themselves. For it was he who removed all the graphic, sexual pictures originally used to illustrate key points. Oh well, without the diagrams I guess there is more room for the imagination. He also sadistically insisted on cutting out the first 300 pages which contained an exhaustive and detailed description of my early childhood, complete with heart-wrenching emotional prose about how I got over the loss of my first pet bullfrog, Zeus. Well, you'll all just have to wait now for the movie.

I also want to express my appreciation to all of the many friends who shared intimate details of their lives with me for inclusion in this book. You should find it relatively easy to identify them through the thinly disguised veneer I used. Some of them are downright saucy. And who was it that said that Jews have no fun?

Finally, in a moment of complete seriousness, I pay homage to the supreme Master of the Universe, God Almighty, whose infinite love and kindness have always sustained me through the trials of life and existence, and blessed me with a wife and family who never fail to brighten the dark moments. May His Glory be blessed for ever and ever.

Shmuley Boteach
London and Oxford, England
January, 1999

# Foreword

## KOSHER SEX, THE SOUL OF MARRIAGE

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and leave his mother. He shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

Genesis 2: 24

*. . . a more perfect delight when we be naked in each other's arms clasped together toying with each other's limbs, buried in each other's bodies, struggling, panting, dying for a moment. Shall we not feel then, even then, that there is more in store for us, that those thrilling writhings are but dim shadows of a union which shall be perfect?*

S. Chitty, *The Beast and the Monk*

*Sex is emotion in motion.*

Mae West

---

I am a man deeply influenced by my parents' divorce when was eight. As I grew up, I had one great wish that haunted me from that moment. I dreamed that one day my parents would remarry, and I am sure that the same is true for many other children who witness the break-up of their parents' marriage.

I became a terrible student who didn't want to grow up, spending most of my time angering teachers and leading petty class revolts. A little voice whispered in my ear, 'Why grow up when this is what is in store for you?' I became a young cynic who believed that nothing in life worked out. The world seemed made of incongruent pieces of a broken puzzle that never really fit, and happiness in life seemed as illusory as it was elusive. At age 13 at my Bar Mitzvah, when my parents asked me (separately) what I wanted as a present, I, being very selfish and materialistic, responded that I wanted them to get back together.

When I was 14 I gave up on the idea of seeing them together again. That was also the age at which I entered into the earliest stage of becoming a Rabbi. Since I couldn't bring my parents back together, I became inspired to pursue a profession that was about mending hearts and healing wounds. Now, 17 years later, my strongest wish is to try to remain happily married myself – and to find a means of helping others to achieve this.

### *Feeling special*

One of the consequences of being the child of divorce is no longer feeling special. I remember how difficult I found it every time the teacher said, 'Now go home and practise this passage of the Bible tonight with your father.' My father was three thousand miles away and I felt deficient, as if something was wrong with me personally that I couldn't correct.

But feeling special and unique is one of the single most important human facets. It is part of our survival instinct. No human comes into this world feeling ordinary. The Bible says that every human being is created 'in the image of God', and what this powerful verse means is that in the same way that God is the one and only – there is no other like Him – every one of us is also the one and only. There is no other like us. And the essence and ultimate purpose of a relationship is to establish and substantiate that uniqueness. When someone chooses to love you, it can mean only one thing: *you are worth loving.*

People today feel vulnerable and rudderless, trapped in a vast impersonal universe which is unfeeling and indifferent to them. They move from relationship to relationship, never quite happy or satisfied. And even when they find a relationship that brings a measure of happiness, they still complain about not feeling completely understood. Loneliness – the image of a man or a woman sitting at home watching TV alone – has become the icon of our generation. To counter this atomisation of humanity, God gave us marriage, the essence of which is to find a soul-mate who grasps us fully. Someone who even in moments of complete silence can read our inner soul and accommodate our innate will. Loneliness, in contrast, is feeling that no one will ever fathom the depth of our spirit and recognise our specialness and individuality. Our generation is suffering from a crisis of intimacy, which manifests itself above all else in our not feeling unique.

Twice in my life I remember feeling exceptionally special, as if I were chosen for some great mission. The first time was when I was in boarding school at age 15 and we had a late-night birthday party for a classmate. The boy in question got extremely drunk, and started telling me that he was a messenger from God who had been sent to tell me that I was the Messiah! 'You have been chosen to redeem the world of its iniquity. You are God's anointed.' I told him he was drunk and should go to sleep. But when he began quoting from obscure Jewish mystical works, proving that my name was alluded to in ancient scripture as the promised redeemer, and began revealing a new and most powerful Cabalistic name of God, everyone who heard him looked at me reverentially, as if an angel had suddenly appeared. Sadly, the next morning everything he said was proven false (but my mother still thinks he had something there).

The second time, and by far the more important, was the morning after I got married, when I heard my wife being referred to as Mrs Boteach. I couldn't hear enough of it.

Here was someone who found me so special that she was prepared to take my last name and share my life. Someone who would come home with me every night, and hear my petty complaints about life and work. Someone who found the beauty within me, even when I saw only my ugliness.

Many of us today attempt to substantiate our existence and become special through world-renowned achievement – by becoming millionaires or Prime Ministers. Indeed, every human being is endowed with a feeling of specialness, as though it is they who can save the planet and redeem the world. Yet not all of us are global Messiahs. But we are all personal Messiahs, able to redeem and uplift the lives of those around us who care for us most. My friend in the story above was right about me. I am the Messiah, albeit a small one (both in size and in stature). We all have the power to redeem and save at least one life by choosing a person and making them feel wanted and special throughout their lives. This is the beauty of marriage and why it is central to human living.

Marriage is a simple statement: your beloved finds you so special and unique that they would rather spend the majority of their remaining time on this earth with you than with any other person. They could have made this commitment to many other people. But they chose to give the commitment to you because they found you the most special. Now, don't you feel peerless?

## *Individuality and marriage*

Though it is a source of pride for me to be a family man – for which I am immensely thankful to God, the source of all blessing – this does not mean that for me, or for anyone else, marriage is always an easy state of affairs. Indeed, my marriage endures some very stormy moments, the fault for which almost always lies firmly in my court.

I am not the kind of person for whom selflessness comes easily. Less so am I the kind of man who naturally subscribes to the closed limits of an institution. On the contrary, one of the by-products of my parents' divorce was that, in large measure, I had to raise myself and so became accustomed to near absolute freedom. My mother worked two jobs to support us, which meant that I grew up without much close supervision. Moreover, I am the youngest of five children, spoilt by everyone, and not very used to sharing.

Nevertheless, I have gradually become aware of a great and simple truth, namely that regardless of the sacrifices marriage entails – and it involves many – marriage and the family are man's greatest source of happiness. No one who marries will ever find someone perfect. In this respect marriage is a statement of deep-seated love for humanity, whereby we love companionship more than we love perfection. Those who hold out for years, dating and discarding people by the dozen, find perfection more tantalising than human company. God created each of us missing an essential something, establishing a life-long need in all of us for someone who is prepared to love us in spite of our flaws and complement our deficiency.

## *Why take my advice?*

My authority for penning a second book on marriage and relationships – my first addressed the issue of maintaining passion in marriage – derives not from any pretensions to be an exemplary husband, lover or father. I make no such claims. Indeed, I feel truly humbled when witnessing the countless men who are my superiors in all these departments. Rather, it derives simply from the fact that the pain of my parents' divorce has caused me to become obsessed with the simple question of how a man and a woman might remain together happily for the duration of their lives, and with the desire to contribute something positive to the state of marriage and parenthood.

Writing a book of this nature can also be therapeutic, in the sense that it can be a means of turning one's traumatic experiences to something life-affirming and good. Nihilism, or suffering for nothing, holds no attraction for me. If the experiences I endured can, in some way, help me to help others bolster the success of their marriage and avoid the tragedy of marital discord, then my experience has been redeeming.

I am not one of those who believe that pain and suffering are life's greatest tutors. There is no suffering servant who is central to Judaism and on account of whose pain humankind attains redemption. On the contrary, I believe that suffering only causes us to be twisted, angry, scarred, cynical and alone. Whatever greatness those who have suffered achieve, it is attained *despite*, and not *because of*, the fact that they have suffered. It is only because we are all bound to ache and grieve at times, given that the world is not yet perfect, that we must, at the very least, integrate these experiences into our lives and allow them to become a blessing by enabling others to learn from our pain.

Indeed, as a Rabbi to students and mature community people – both Jewish and non-Jewish – at the University of Oxford and in London for over a decade, I have witnessed many people in deep pain, much of which has been caused by relationships gone awry. I have sat with husbands and wives who could not help but abuse each other even in my presence, and many wives have asked me advice when they heard of their husband's infidelity. I grew up with a close homosexual friend and watched him struggle with the Herculean task of finding love and companionship without compromising the essentials of his faith. And I have watched a mother's struggle to comfort and raise her children while stifling her own pain and loneliness.

Throughout this period I have sought to identify what makes a marriage work and what destroys its prospects, the actions that bring a couple together and those that create gulfs and distance. And I have learned an important lesson. We human beings cannot stop earthquakes and prevent all car accidents. But we can do something about the tragedy of aloneness that affects so many people in the information age, a world in which machines and technology have become ever more alluring than people. There is no need for a society in which images on the television screen constitute the main form of fellowship.

## *Sewing together two souls as one*

The focus of this book is on sex, and the central place it occupies within marriage and relationships. Our generation outwardly aspires to great sex, but inwardly to kosher sex, as I hope to demonstrate. This book is designed to define what kosher sex is and to assist the reader in bringing it into his or her life.

I know that sex itself sells and is in great demand. But why does none of our most sophisticated social commentators speak of the possibility that sexual lust is designed to make us dependent on human closeness and warmth in much the same way that it is responsible for the survival of the species? Why does everyone assume that the sexual urge is there merely to be satisfied? Perhaps the purpose of sex is to have us hunger for human company in perpetuity.

*It is the central premise of this book that the real, underlying reason we seek sex is not physical pleasure, but emotional intimacy. We do not seek mere orgasms, but rather the incredibly close proximity of another warm human being. And because our sex lives are today not yielding emotional intimacy, we are fast becoming bored with sex. It is becoming an empty experience which leaves no trace and few pleasant memories. Hence the need for* kosher *sex.*

Here we arrive at a strange paradox. Ours is simultaneously the most oversexed and yet also the loneliest generation of all time. If sex is physically the closest two people will ever come to each other, why is it not breeding emotional intimacy? How is it that two people can share the pleasures of the flesh and still not be tied by the strings of the heart? I speak to young people all the time who tell me that, although they have been dating – or living together – for several years, they still can't get married because they don't feel they know each other well enough yet. 'I still feel unsure about Jerry,' one 27-year-old woman told me of her boyfriend of five years. 'Parts of his personality worry me, even scare me.'

Statements such as this result from the simple fact that, although the Bible refers to physical love as the ultimate form of knowledge, sex today often confuses more than it clarifies. Ask the average young person what their relationship means to them, and you will often receive ambiguous replies. Today's relationships involve very misty definitions. They do not necessarily entail love. Many are based on convenience, or of such short duration that love is not given the opportunity to flourish. Others will say that their relationship is based on intensity of emotion. But they also concede that one may feel very intensely about a close friend. Still others define a relationship as having sex together. But indeed many people have sex today outside any formal relationship.

Yet the one thing that everyone repeatedly tells me is that they think the most essential component of a relationship is exclusivity. A relationship today means that you have sex with your partner and with no one else. And this is what people mean when they say they wish to be in a fulfilling relationship. Above all else they want this very special exclusivity. People are still clamouring not just for pleasure, but for *intimacy* in their relationships – but they are rarely finding it.

## *The wise man and the clever man*

An ancient Jewish aphorism declares that the difference between the wise man and the clever man is that the clever man can extricate himself from a situation into which the wise man would never have got himself in the first place. Ours is a clever generation, not a wise one. Libraries of self-help books now dot the book-selling landscape giving advice on how to rectify every problem that arises in life and relationships.

Your sex life has become boring. No problem. Pull out a bull whip, or tie your partner up to the lampshade. Even better, rent a blue video at the local shop with a title like 'Honey, I Accommodated the Entire Neighbourhood'. Your husband ignores you. No problem. Toss the bum out and get yourself a temporary lover to restore your self-confidence.

But our parents and grandparents never had self-help books or other aids. Was it because they weren't interested in personal growth? Or was it because they were wise and took pre-emptive action to forestall problems that they knew might later arise, while we conduct our lives and relationships on a crisis-to-crisis basis? We are fire-fighters while they were town-planners.

Having spent ten years counselling people on marriage and relationships, I now believe that most of us are crisis workers, not lovers. We have no plan for our intimate lives, so flames erupt in every brush, while we arbitrarily stamp them out. We'd rather rely on our cleverness in extricating ourselves from difficulties as and when they arise than confront the issue head on.

Nowhere is this more in evidence than in our attitudes to sex. We don't know what quite to make of it. Is it something we should do, watch on TV, discuss, ignore, indulge, or suppress? Sex at once excites us, compels us, rules us, yet also bores us, provoking yawns and serving as the butt of jokes. Boys and girls today begin having sex in their tender teens, yet seemed disillusioned – weary and worn out – by the time they hit their twenties.

Studies show that most women who begin having sex in their mid-teens do so not for pleasure, but because they fear being thought prudish. The 1948 *Kinsey Report* found that for 75 per cent of American men intercourse lasted no more than two minutes. A recent survey by New York University's sleep disorders centre found that more than five million Americans habitually fall asleep while making love. (The report did not reveal whether their partner noticed any difference in their performance.) Sex has become like running water. Now that it is available on tap, we take it for granted and give it little thought. It is truly a crime that the highest form of human bonding is given scant thought by intelligent adults.

Yet sex is the single most important factor in keeping a man and a woman happily under the same roof together for a lifetime. Libraries of studies show that couples who have healthy love lives also have healthy marriages. Furthermore, sex is the only human undertaking which, when we get it right, rids us of all inhibition and manifests our innermost essence. As such, it *is* the ultimate form of knowledge. No other component of a relationship can make two adults feel so intensely good about each other, and no other subject therefore requires more wisdom and guidance.

Marriage counsellors and sex gurus have even given up on the centrality of sex within marriage. Communication – talking things through – has become the mantra of the age. But the ignorance of sex, far from being innocent, has serious repercussions. Foremost among them is the loss of intimacy: we are all making love with our bodies, but not with our minds or our souls.

### *Why Judaism?*

While I am a Rabbi and this book does contain the word 'kosher' in its title, it is not a book that draws only on Jewish sources and wisdom. Less so is it a book meant only for Jews. Rather, the essentially Jewish grounding of the book derives from Judaism's unique qualifications to discuss both sex and relationships. Unlike other religious traditions, Judaism has never had a prudish or conservative sexual ethic. On the contrary, Judaism has always celebrated the commitment that exists between a loving man and woman. The physical component of commitment has often served for the Cabalists (Jewish mystics) as a metaphor for the love and interaction between God and man.

Long ago, well before Christianity enacted legislation forbidding its clerics to marry or have sex, the ancient Rabbis were giving explicit sexual advice to married men and women as to how they could enjoy pleasurable, yet holy, intimate relations. The Rabbis made female orgasm an obligation incumbent on every Jewish husband. No man was allowed to use a woman merely for his own gratification.

Of course, one might reject the need for any religious guidance or pronouncements on sex in favour of a totally liberal sexual ethic without rules or impediments. But a sexual life without rules leads to the debasement and depersonalisation of sex, where long-term love and pleasure are substituted with short-term sensual indulgence, which ultimately deadens our sexuality and leads us to treat our own bodies with contempt. A greater appreciation for conversation in marriage rather than physical love is the next logical step.

Rather than offering prescriptive rules about sex and marriage, Judaism offers guidelines, or what might be called *erotic channels of communication*, designed not to circumscribe our sexual routine, but to focus it and make it potent, so that sex becomes passionate and effective in conjuring up long-term emotions and commitment. Neither does

Judaism go in for guilt, harping on one's sexual past or sins. Sex is a motion designed to engender deep and lasting emotions.

On the contrary, the essence of Jewish thought is *gei veiter* – always move forward. Never become mired in your past. Possessed deep within the infinite soul of man is the opportunity to reinvent himself constantly. We can always reclaim our innocence. Whatever man has done in the past, tomorrow brings a new day with limitless capacity for a new beginning in human relationships. Judaism is not out to condemn man for his sexual nature or his love for sensual pleasure, but rather to uplift man from the realm of the animal so that he enjoys human sexual relations, as opposed to ridding himself of a biological urge. Even marriages that appear dormant can greatly benefit from ancient Rabbinical advice about how to rekindle the lamp of erotic passion in one's relationship.

Every marriage involves the orchestration of two polar opposites. For any relationship to be successful, it must embody two contradictory extremes. One is passion, the other is intimacy. One is a love like fire, the other a love like water, and there's the rub, because the two are, of course, mutually exclusive. Couples desire to be not only lovers, but also best friends. They wish to enjoy a passionate and exciting sex life, but also wish for the tranquillity and soothing qualities of life-long companionship. Sure, a woman sometimes wants her husband to throw her onto the kitchen table and make passionate love, but she also wants to come home nights and curl up with a book next to her comforting husband and a warm fireplace. We sometimes love running away to Paris for the weekend. But we also want to come home to our own place and have somebody waiting for us. We desire novelty, but also predictability.

The instant availability of sex has undermined both these key marital ingredients. Immediate sexual gratification is the destroyer of passion, excitement, and eroticism, while sex

with many partners and exposure to endless explicit sexual images is the destroyer of intimacy. Throughout this book I will explore what kind of sex serves to bring together these opposites of passion and intimacy, and what kind doesn't. Every sexual matter of substance will be addressed. Is there a sexual position that is most conducive to greater intimacy? How can sex best be employed to smooth over the jagged edges of a relationship, and should sex be used to end arguments? This is a very sore point between an overwhelming percentage of women, who wish to talk things through, and the men in their lives who would much rather kiss and make up. Is it proper for husbands and wives to have sex when they are angry with each other? Is it appropriate for sex sometimes to be used as a weapon? For instance, if she feels that her husband is being particularly insensitive about something, should a woman withhold sex until she gets her way?

Because sex is the central key in engendering emotional intimacy, the focus of this book is on sex and the familiarity and warmth it fosters. First it offers a perspective on sex and its purpose. It then looks at sexual techniques, with specific emphasis on those that engender intimacy. And it tackles many familiar questions: is masturbation an impediment to marital unity? What of pornography and prostitution? Is it true that marriage is a killer of passion and intimacy? Why is sex the most pleasurable human experience? Why is sex in the dark so much more personal than sex with the lights on? Is oral sex kosher sex? What constitutes sexual deviance? Will sex before marriage affect our ability to create long-lasting ties with members of the opposite sex?

### *Most married couples today are either lovers or great friends*

In counselling couples I witness two types of marriage. In the first type, a couple are the best of friends. They share every secret and can read each other's minds, knowing every thought before it is even expressed. They are trusted companions who stick together through all of life's vicissitudes. The problem: they have little or no passion. They are best friends, but not lovers.

The second type of marriage is fiery, both for good and for bad. A couple are lovers. There is much excitement in the marriage, but they fight a lot as well. They shout and argue and make up with passionate love. Their marital flame burns too brightly.

Rarely do we see marriages that somehow straddle these two opposites and unite the best aspects of both. My purpose in this book is to show how to bring into marriage the kind of positive feelings and warmth that only sex can induce and only friendship can sustain.

## PART ONE

# The Sex File

# 1

# Lust and commitment

*Yes, sex without love is an empty experience. But as empty experiences go, it's one of the best.*

Woody Allen

*Marriage is like a three-ring circus. First the engagement ring, second the wedding ring, and third the suffer-ring.*

Anonymous

Michael Jackson steps off an aeroplane in Eastern Europe and thirty thousand fans await his arrival. He feels mighty special. They all want him and shout his name. They've taken time off work to greet and cheer his arrival. But then, off the same plane steps Mr Jones. There aren't thirty thousand people waiting for him. In fact, there is only one woman – Mrs Jones, who's there to meet her husband on his return home. And while everyone walks by, even when Michael Jackson himself walks by, she ignores them all. To her, Mr Jones is even more important, more thrilling, than the world's biggest pop star. And when Mr Jones reaches the arrivals gate and sees his wife's smile and excitement, he feels as special as she does.

How can everyday, ordinary people become so special to one another? When I was a child, I saw Muhammad Ali walking in Miami Beach. I got his autograph and ran home to ask my mother if we could invite him home for dinner. But that night my older brother was returning from boarding school, and my mother was preparing a big dinner in his honour. 'I don't need Muhammad Ali at the table, Shmuley.

I am much more excited that your brother will be here.' Why would a mother want to see her ordinary son rather than dine with the world's greatest sportsman? The answer, of course, is love. Love has the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary and magical. Or, even better stated, love has the power to unearth and reveal how all people really are special. Love not only gives us wings. It gives us vision.

### *The fear of commitment*

Yet nowadays people, particularly young people, shun commitment. They prefer sex to love, and therefore never achieve this vision. I've watched countless young couples date at Oxford and fall in love. Some undergraduates date and remain loyal to each other the length of their three years at Oxford, and a great many students live together while at Oxford. In many cases they come from traditional homes, but they still don't contemplate marriage, preferring to remain somewhat uncommitted.

I often ask them why not? If this is the person you love, and you agree that they are marriage material, why not marry? Why not have someone who chooses to be with you above everyone else, perennially making you feel unique and unbreakable, untouchable and undefeatable? The most common response is typified by this one: 'You can't marry and expect someone else to fulfil you. You've got to do it yourself. You first have to grow and develop on your own. You have to know who you are. Only then can you join with someone else and seek to build something.' Their mindset is that growth, happiness and contentment are primarily an inner, solitary experience.

### *Love not war*

There is an unshakable belief that the world is getting better and better and more at peace with itself. The possibility of a world war today is remote, the spread of liberal democracy continues, and nations are working together in new economic communities as well as contributing large sums to poorer countries in foreign aid. In our personal lives we all want a slice of this fabulous freedom too. We feel we would be mad not to want to realise the opportunities that previous generations could only dream of.

Yes, we are willing to concede that the technology available to us to master our world doesn't make our lives easier so much as challenge us on to ever more ambitious achievements. The exertion of effort to communicate with people across the world is nowhere near as trying as it was just half a century ago. But those who own portable phones, and are effectively on call 24 hours a day, can testify to the entrapment, rather than the convenience, that modern living affords. It's all part of the game, for we don't want to miss our connection to go up to the next level of play. Who needs someone who might slow us down?

### *Sex as a basic necessity*

And anyway, aren't love and sex one and the same, a biological necessity like food? Our hormones and genes force us into sex. Our bodies forever feel they need sensual pleasure and sexual release, and so we find someone and we copulate. In the famous rape trial of William Kennedy Smith in Palm Springs, Florida, Smith, who was acquitted, took the stand and was questioned by his attorney, Robert Black, who asked him whether he had made love to the victim. He answered, 'Bob, you're a little old-fashioned. I wouldn't say we made love. Rather, we had sex.' Sex is no more than an urge; young people might say they're horny just as if to say they are hungry.

Evolutionists would describe this urge as being responsible for the survival of the species. The sex drive is nature working to guarantee the widest possible distribution of the organism's gene pool. Far from being an act of love, sex is a momentary interruption of the war between man and woman by a truce with the higher goal of human survival.

Robert Wright, author of *The Moral Animal*, captures this feeling brilliantly: 'The feeling of hunger, no less than the stomach, is here because it helped keep our ancestors alive long enough to reproduce and rear their young. Feelings of lust, no less than the sex organs, are here because they aided reproduction directly. Any ancestors who lacked stomachs or hunger or sex organs or lust – well, they wouldn't have become ancestors, would they?'

## *Sex is not a trivial mathematical equation*

But, honestly, who really buys all this? Am I the only one who feels slightly uncomfortable about the analogy between sex and our bowels? What of emotional hunger? A friend once told me that for the last two years of her marriage she had withheld sex from her husband because every night he would merely climb on and off her so that she was made to feel that he 'was going to the bathroom on top of me, and as soon as he was relieved I was discarded and he fell asleep'. Would our response be any different? Would anyone's hunger for sex really be satisfied if their spouse treated them that way?

Sex cannot be compared to satisfying one's stomach. Eating is something we do by and for ourselves. But the transfer of seed from male to female comes about through the closest possible human contact. Sex transcends by far the biological fact of reproduction; it makes us hunger for people. We cannot reproduce alone: the survival of the human race is inextricably linked with human closeness and human intimacy. Sex is not a chemical formula. It is simply the only human activity that physically necessitates another human being.

## *The objective truth about sex*

And let's not kid ourselves. We are not the sex-crazed society that we pretend to be, or, if we are, it is only in speech, not in action. Certainly, everywhere we look there is sex: in films, television, newspapers, and magazines, and a recent study shows that the average man thinks of sex some six times per hour. But the place where it is really absent is in the bedroom. Contemporary studies such as the comprehensive survey *Sex in America* show that people are having surprisingly little sex these days (for example, more women over 30 are *not* having partnered sex than are having it), and that young single people have far less sex than married people.

Nor are people really enjoying sex much either. Women report enjoying sex less than 30 per cent of the time, whereas men report being pleased only 47 per cent of the time. According to *Sex in America*, the presumption that our society and generation are saturated with sex is erroneous: 'The general picture of sex with a partner in America shows that Americans do not have a secret life of abundant sex. If nothing else, the startlingly modest amounts of partnered sex reveal how much we as a society can deceive ourselves about other people's sex lives.'

## *Sex draws men and women together, love turns it into commitment*

And you may agree that we are not as sex-driven as we say we are. None the less, you may say, who needs commitment when sex or, better, lust alone pulls us to share our lives with others? Isn't that enough in itself? If our hormones compel us toward other people, what do we need emotion and love for?

There are two answers to that, one simple and the other profound. The simple answer is this: we can't always have sex, so it is an ineffective way of keeping people together. People can't be at it 24 hours a day, seven days a week (not all of us are Italian). We have to support ourselves and our families. And we are also incapable of living in continual sexual anxiety and expectation. The world would be an awful place if men and women could relate to each other only as potential sexual partners. But we can always be in love, even when physically separated by a vast distance. Love is much more spiritual than sex.

But this deals with expediency alone. Far more important is the fact that sex is indiscriminate. Love is not. Sex pulls us toward other people *in general* and there are plenty of people who are willing to have sex with just about anyone. Sex requires no particular person. But love draws us to one person in particular, and accounts for the human drive to build a family and a home, and subsequently a society and a civilisation. Sex certainly guarantees the propagation of the species, but love guarantees that people will live together in groups. It is love that makes marriage, and not sex.

So, why do we need sex at all? Why not have only love? The reason is that love can be sustained only by constant sexual interaction. Only sex has the power to call forth our deepest, most powerful emotions. Sex at its best is where a couple are overwhelmed by a wave of positive physical sensations which make them feel intensely good about each other, so that they bond. That is, so long as it is kosher sex. The problem is this: sex today is primarily about ignoring emotion. Sex is seen as merely a bodily function which needs to be serviced. Sex is for the purpose of pleasure only, without any commitment. We ignore the mystery and consciously stifle the strings of attachment that naturally follow in the wake of the sexual experience. People not only have

sex in spite of a lack of emotion, they do so with the express purpose of suppressing emotion. They wish to remain non-committed. This is definitely unkosher sex, because it represses the natural response that sex is meant to elicit. Sex and commitment are the ultimate forms of human closeness, and we cannot be close and distant at the same time.

## 2

# Sex and doing what's expected

*As bees their sting, so the promiscuous leave behind them in each encounter something of themselves by which they are made to suffer.*

Cyril Connolly

*That woman speaks eighteen languages and can't say No in any of them.*

Dorothy Parker

*Sex – the poor man's polo.*

Clifford Odets

Judging from my counselling experience it is women who are most hurt by the casualness and callousness of modern sex. Young women in particular seem to feel that they have to do what is expected of them. This realisation struck me most forcefully when I received a phone call one evening from a close friend in Oxford asking if I could meet that night with a young woman of 19 who was so depressed she threatened to commit suicide. 'What is the cause or nature of her depression?' I asked. 'It's better if she tells you herself,' my friend replied, 'as it is of a very personal nature and she has to want to tell you.'

So there I was at eight o'clock in a friend's house with a girl who looked completely distraught, as if her life were at an end. She introduced herself meekly and for a long time we sat in silence as I waited for her to say something.

'What's wrong?' I finally asked. 'Did you have a fight with your parents? Have you split up with a boyfriend? Have

you lost your job? Do you need money?' She ignored my questions. Finally, she responded, 'No! But it does have something to do with my boyfriend, or at least my former boyfriend.' 'What?' I pressed the question. 'Did he beat you? Was he unfaithful? Please tell me, what's the matter?' 'It's none of that,' she replied. 'I caught something from him. I discovered last week that I am HIV positive.'

Her words hit me like a bombshell. Oxford is not a sheltered city, and having served for ten years as Rabbi to the students of the University, I have heard or seen most things. I have met several gay men, mostly in their thirties and forties, who were either HIV positive or had actual AIDS. But this just seemed very different. This girl was just a kid. Yet she had already contracted the most dreaded disease of the age. 'Are you still with this boyfriend? Does he know?' I said.

'Actually,' she looked up, 'I'm not sure which boyfriend it was. It could be one of 11 men who I've been with in the past year.' I tried hard not to raise my eyebrows. 'But you're only 19. At what age did you start having sex?' I asked her. 'I started late,' she said, 'I was 17. But I made up a lot of lost time quickly. I had a lot of men and I wasn't careful about protection or disease. My attitude was that it would never happen to me.'

She sighed, then continued. 'Isn't it ironic that from an act of love such torment can follow.' 'Is that why you had sex with them? So many of them? Because you loved them?' I asked. 'Of course not! Sex is just something you experiment with, you know, for fun,' she said. I came away from that meeting with a deep sense of sadness. After the bad news, the young woman of course felt very low. But the depth of her despair resulted from the realisation that in some way she had parted cheaply with something valuable.

### *Sex and a feeling of loss*

Other women have confirmed this. One woman whom I know from Oxford as a student told us that she has now been to bed with over 20 guys – got naked with them, as she put it – all in a fruitless effort to find love with any one of them, and it just never seems to happen. She is attractive, intelligent, well-educated, and she would love to fall in love and get married. But she doesn't seem to stick to anyone after sex and no one seems to stick to her either. The sex is pleasurable, but not warm or intimate. She has yet to transform a casual sexual encounter into an intense and fulfilling relationship.

Another female student said that at the age of 20 she had undertaken the goal of sleeping with a man in every one of the 50 United States. Although she had only managed 38, she too pointed out that the more men she slept with, the more having sex was no bigger a decision than going to a film. Thus, as the project had lost its appeal, she gave up.

### *The rub for men*

But men suffer equally. It may well be that we are naturally inclined to sex as a disposable, biological obsession. Let's face it. One minute our skin is tingling and our tongues are sweeping the carpet. But the very moment after sexual satisfaction has been achieved, we are as interested in our sexual partner as we are in going to the dentist's chair. Sleep is all we can think of.

None the less, we pay the price in a different currency. I have met too many husbands who justified having affairs because their wives didn't want sex or were bored of it, and who later discovered that the wives themselves were having a steamy affair, much to their shock. Their wives, they discovered, were bored of sex because of their husbands' neglect. 'I honestly didn't believe that she had it in her. I would never have suspected it. My wife's just not the type.'

And there are enough men who have doubts about their active 'biological' life. One handsome and highly successful investment banker, who had taken scores of women to bed, once called me on the morning after yet another conquest. 'Shmuley,' he said, 'if I do this just one more time I will not be able to look at myself in the mirror. I woke up this morning trembling and I still can't explain why.'

### *Back to basics*

Our modern mindset does not seem to get us very far. What few of us realise today is that the yearning for emotional intimacy is as real as the hunger for food and water, shelter and clothing. Animals may copulate and then separate, but humans are radically different. We have sex with our minds wide awake. What goes on in our body is not enough. We neglect an essential part of ourselves if we reduce sex to something that is not intimate but merely biological compunction. In fact, we harm ourselves with our casual approach to sex.

There are three possibilities as to what sex is about: pleasure, procreation, or oneness. Judaism, believing that the path to holiness is always found in the 'golden middle', rejects the far-right extreme of sex-is-only-for-babies. Neither does Judaism embrace the extreme secular view that sex is for fun and pleasure. Rather, Judaism says that the purpose of sex is to synthesise and orchestrate two people together as one. Sex is the ultimate bonding process. God, in his infinite kindness, gave a man and a woman who are joined together in matrimonial holiness the most pleasurable way possible of calling forth their capacity to join onto another human being and feel permanently attached.

What we have forgotten is that sex presents us with a choice. If we do it right, sex is a technique based on a profound understanding of ourselves, in much the same way that food may be kosher or unkosher. A Jew is commanded to eat kosher food (prepared according to Biblical guidelines) because it is this kind of food that serves to elevate the human condition to a higher spiritual plane and to draw him closer to God. Similarly, just as a human does not stick his head into a trough the same way that a horse would, he does not and should not copulate the way animals do. Intimate sex done right elevates what can be an indulgent, animalistic human practice to a higher plane where we realise the full glory of being human. As the Bible says, 'A man shall leave his father and his mother, he shall cleave unto his wife [have sex with her] and they shall become one flesh.'

Our mind needs to be at the centre of someone else's universe. This is what we have to admit to ourselves. All we want deep down is to be sun kings or queens like Louis XIV of France. We all want to be the sun with a planet revolving around us. We need a human being who cherishes and desires us above all others in order to survive, live, prosper, and contribute to the world that particular gift that only we can give. We need to rise to this challenge if we want to reach our destination as humans. We are all obligated, as the ancient Rabbis wrote two thousand years ago, to feel, even to proclaim, that 'The world was created for me.'

Marriage is the ultimate setting for this commitment to our lover. In it we can always feel loved and never know loneliness, and feel almost as special as the Almighty Himself. Through the unique set-up of marriage, bonding two people in a bulwark against the rest of the world, we are assured that we are irreplaceable and a key part of the world, the world we have claimed for ourselves. This is the source of marriage's sanctity, security, and holiness. We are the sun, and our spouse is the planet that revolves around us and basks in our light, in the same way that we are part of our spouse's universe. But it is up to us to recognise this commitment. And act upon it.

## 3

# The real power of sex

*Love is the delusion that one woman differs from another.*

H. L. Mencken

*Is sex dirty? Only if it's done right!*

Woody Allen

*When I'm good I'm good. But when I'm bad, I'm even better.*

Mae West

Once my wife and I were sitting in a restaurant with a close female friend, who lamented the break-up of her latest relationship. 'Once we started having sex together – and we waited a month before that happened – the whole thing got so complicated,' she said. 'But that's also when I started loving him more, and becoming more attached.' She then claimed to have an extraordinary power: 'I can look around the room and see exactly which couples in this restaurant are having sex and which aren't. You can tell by all the little things.'

'Big deal,' I said. 'You can do that only because everyone is having sex. Hey, this is the '90s! All you've got to do is look around and anyone whose pulse hasn't stop beating, or who doesn't look like a geek sitting having dinner working with his laptop, or isn't under 13 years of age, is definitely having sex!'

But she was undaunted. 'Very funny. But I am serious. You can see if they are having sex by how close they feel to each other. How they look at each other, how they speak to each other; even how they argue. People who are having sex are just that much more intimate, even if to them it is only fun. Why do you think that women try and avoid, or feel embarrassed when bumping into, men they have slept with in the past? Because they feel too intimate, as if the guy knows something about them that no one else does. You immediately try to avoid eye-contact.'

## *Sex changes us*

Now I didn't exactly get up and go around from table to table asking the couples, 'Hey, my friend and I have a bet on. Can you just tell us, please, are you sleeping together?' but I do believe that she is absolutely right and that it is discernible. Sex is much more powerful than 'fun', for recreation leaves no trace. One can spend all night playing video games having fun, but in the morning the experience, except for red eyes, will be utterly forgotten. Sex is different. Two human beings don't become entangled and then disentangle so easily.

Yet this power of sex is today's lost continent. We said earlier that too many single young people today don't know more about sex than that it is related to physical lust. If you ask them what sex does, they won't even understand the question. 'Why,' they answer, you have sex to have fun, no? Pleasure! To gratify your sex drive. What else is there to it?' Inside marriage the situation isn't much better. Husbands and wives will have sex as part of their daily, weekly, monthly, or annual (oh my!) routine. One husband even explained to me how the nightly sex of marriage is far superior as a tranquilliser to the sleeping tablets he used to take as a bachelor (did his wife notice?). Another woman – whose husband comes home very late every night from work – told me that she doesn't mind her husband's nightly need for sex, just so long as it doesn't wake her up. 'He's very good about letting me sleep.'

## *What sex does*

Even intelligent and erudite people are clueless as to what sex is really about. I saw this most pointedly in an article by the usually more sober *Time* magazine writer Barbara Ehrenreich; an essay which I found as deep as a puddle in the crack of a footpath. Mrs Ehrenreich argued that sex is about fun and she was pleased that the population explosion that had excited world fears about over-population would now change the long-held position that sex was about procreation. The whole subject would revert back to its most important phase: that sex is a big game. 'Sex, in our overpopulated world, is best seen as a source of fun.' It's one thing to argue that 'sex should be separated from the all-too-serious business of reproduction'. It is quite another, however, to consign it to the ranks of Sega and Nintendo.

Only AIDS and the phenomenal increase in teenage pregnancy (in the UK the highest in Europe) seem to have added a somewhat sharper edge to this pandemic light-heartedness. And yet, they too merely confirm the non-emotional, purely biological aspect of sex. As Marlon Brando said, 'I don't think I was constructed to be monogamous. I don't think it's the nature of *any* man to be monogamous . . . Men are propelled by genetically ordained impulses over which they have no control to distribute their seed into as many females as possible.' Moreover, because sexual diseases are 'objective' risks widely covered in the media, they steal the attention from the other, more invisible sexual disease, namely, that an abundance of sexual partners seriously impairs our ability to sustain intimacy.

Don't get me wrong. Sex is probably just as pleasurable today as it was in days gone by. It is also probably just as powerful, and occupies the thoughts of men and women as much as it did previously, if not more. But what sex has *seemingly* lost is an ability to make a man and a woman feel intensely about each other and closer to each other. It is as though sex no longer changes the way a man and a woman feel about each other. It is pleasurable while it lasts, but the feeling quickly dissipates shortly thereafter.

My students bear this out constantly. Andrew and Shirley met at an Oxford pub and felt instantly attracted to each other. They spoke for hours until the pub closed, when they went to Shirley's college room. They ended up in bed, spending a passionate night together. In the morning, Andrew kissed her on the cheek and said he'd call. Two days later they bumped into each other on the street. Andrew was friendly and very polite, but nothing more. 'Let's meet up again soon,' he yelled as he ran to catch a bus. But Shirley was devastated. 'Did nothing happen two nights ago?' she asked herself.

## *The psychology of sex*

Here lies the problem. We give indiscriminately and then naively expect things to sort themselves according to which of our expectations we choose to fasten upon our gift. But the problem is always attributed to other causes. I have grown weary of hearing endless sex experts explain how the high divorce rate is due to the fact that women are no longer financially dependent on men, or that the growing weakness of patriarchy has contributed to a more liberated female mindset, or that the loss of intimacy in society can easily be repaired with the two greatest buzzwords of all of today's relationships experts: greater communication. Libraries are filled with nonsense spoken by experts.

Saying that women have greater financial freedom and will therefore refuse to remain in a loveless marriage does not explain how that marriage became loveless in the first place. Relationships work on basics and fundamentals, so many of which have been lost, and our hearts have been broken in the process. One of those basics is the exclusivity

of sex and hence its intimacy when shared between a loving man and woman. Every sexual survey ever carried out has shown the same result: the more sexual partners you have before marriage, the greater the chance of divorce – exponentially! Too many cooks spoil the broth and too many sexual partners spoil the bond.

## *The spell cast by history*

The culprit in all this is the Western romantic ideal, which says that ideally love leads to sex. Through sharing experiences, showing one another consideration, gentleness, and warmth, would-be-lovers slowly fall in love. And love leads on to sex, the apogee of the relationship. Every great classical love story involves these stages; the sexual act is, in the Western romantic view, the consummation of love. And the operative word really is to 'consummate'. Sex is the summit of male–female relationships. Love would be incomplete without out it. Before the act there is *love*, but only sex can elevate it to the next level: *making love.*

To Jews this is completely unintelligible. The Bible says about the first human coupling, 'Adam came to know his wife Eve.' Prior to their physical coupling, they may have known each other but they were only acquaintances. There was no love. No one within the Jewish community would so degrade love as to claim that it can possibly be formed first, in so short a period of time, and secondly, without direct physical contact.

Even if they were best friends, they were only acquainted with their externalities. They did not possess the kind of knowledge that linked and hooked them together for ever. They knew only each other's most revealed aspects. They knew what kind of cuisine the other liked, the holiday destination each preferred, who their favourite artists were, and which music they most enjoyed listening to. They even knew the main issues that had troubled their childhood and how they got along with their parents. In short, each knew what the other *did*, but did not know what the other *was*. They didn't know how the other would behave when all inhibition and social adjustment had been surrendered.

Love came only through physical intimacy. As Adam and Eve took off all their outer garments and inner restraints and behaved around each other in exactly the same fashion as they behaved around themselves, that was when they came to know each other. Only then did they fathom each other's essence, peering deep beneath the outer layers into the heart and through the windows of the soul.

## *The power of carnal knowledge*

As a Chassidic Jew I feel this even more keenly. We marry after a short courtship. My wife and I, for example, were introduced, as is the Chassidic Jewish custom, by a mutual friend. I had known Debbie's parents in Australia, and had heard many complimentary things about her (what else would you expect a mother to say?). On our first date, I was 21 and she was 19. We were both shy (OK, OK, I wasn't, she was. But I pretended to be shy since I believe shyness is a great virtue). It was the first time either of us had ever dated. For four weeks we drove around New York and Miami, sharing drinks and dinners, discussing every subject under the sun, getting to know each other. We then made our decision. We would marry. We had not yet held hands and we shared no physical intimacy until the wedding night (yes, it was a major bummer).

The reasons for this emphasis on brevity of courtship are best explained where the Bible says, 'Isaac then brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife; and he loved her.' First, a man and a woman meet. They do not necessarily know how attractive they will prove to each other. However, assuming that they meet and everything goes well, they continue to see each other for a period of time, say a few weeks or even a few months, and then they decide on marriage.

Do they love each other? Probably not. They might feel very attracted to, and have strong feelings for, each other. But on their wedding night it all happens, aided and abetted by sex. They unite in carnal knowledge for the first time. And it is the potency and power of this physical act, which they are both discovering for the first time, that is truly explosive and engenders a pleasurable love appropriate to marriage bridging the chasm that once separated them. They feel no need to restrain or suppress the natural glue that sex conjures up, for they have already committed themselves to each other. From there it can only increase and grow, as they begin to share a life together.

## *Sex is meant to make two people become one*

This belief finds a perfect expression in a Dutch slang-word for sex, *naaien*, which is also the word for sewing. Two garments are put together side by side so that they touch, and a strong thread is pulled and passed between them by a needle that will keep them securely fastened together long after the sewing is over. It is thus not the fact of the sewing itself that later ensures that they do not come apart, but rather the after-effects of the sewing, namely that the stitched thread that has made them both into one garment remains strung between them. And the same is true of sex. Repeated acts of lovemaking ensure that the threads are tightened, secured, and strengthened.

This thread is also what ultimately curbs the predatory side of husbands. The love that is engendered means that a man's wife is always on his mind. He could no more invite a woman back to his empty hotel room than he could invite that same woman into his marital bed in his wife's presence. In his heart and mind, his marriage and the beautiful moments he has shared with his wife make him feel as though she is with him and attached to him always.

## 4

# The myth of compatibility

*I love her too, but our neuroses just don't match.*

Arthur Miller

*To be happy with a man you must understand him a lot and love him a little. To be happy with a woman you must love her a lot and not try to understand her at all.*

Helen Rowland

*The most common error made in matters of appearance is the belief that one should disdain the superficial and let the true beauty of one's soul shine through. If there are places on your body where this is a possibility, you are not attractive – you are leaking.*

Fran Lebowitz

I hear you say, but what about sexual compatibility? The argument (which is so important in relationships today) goes that a couple must have sex before marriage to discover whether or not they are sexually suitable. Even better is for each to have sex with various partners before marriage in order to ensure that the person you will marry is tailor-made sexually. It is extremely important, apparently, since different people have different sexual metabolisms. One person who enjoys sex all the time might end up marrying someone with little or no interest in sex.

This opinion is deeply entrenched nowadays and is defended even if it flies in the face of experience. When I once complimented one of our married Oxford students on how perfectly suited he and his wife seemed, he replied, 'We met at 16 and dated for five years straight. She was my high-school sweetheart. But when I was 22 we broke up at my instigation. I wanted to marry her but I wanted to be sure that she and I were right, and since she was the only woman I had had sex with, I had to find some other women just to try it out. I suggested to her that she do the same, but she refused, and till today I remain the only guy she's been with. Eventually, after four or five other girlfriends, I concluded that I loved her far more, and we had a special sexual chemistry. That's the reason we now get along so well. It wasn't an accident, you know.'

### *Sex is indiscriminate*

I don't get that. To me his relationship with his wife-to-be survived *despite* his dalliances, and not because of them. In Judaism, the basic belief is that physical intimacy between a man and a woman is strong enough to conjure up and sustain emotional intimacy. Sexual compatibility is a red herring. Sex on its own is strong enough to engender and force a significant reaction, veritably a transformation in character and status. It's simply that some people's sexual side is naturally manifest, while others need it to be more revealed by their partner's bringing it out through intense affection.

Sexual compatibility is something that must be worked on by heaping love and attention on one's lover. Every woman can be an enchantress and every man a Casanova. If your wife isn't, you ignored her and allowed your attention to be focused on other women, even when you were in her presence. You thought about other women when you were making love to her and she felt it. So she lost interest in sex, *with you*. When you say 'She is not my type' you are saying I am not *her* type. She may have found someone else. With

someone who is prepared to risk all because he finds her attractive, she will come alive like a sexual tigress and respond to the risk he is taking by risking all for him.

### *The key is physical attraction*

Rather than sexual compatibility we should see that the motor of a successful marriage is physical attraction. Physical attractiveness is the only aspect of our person that draws our spouse to us automatically and intuitively, without our having to act or to speak.

If a man loves his wife because she is a good person, he must always see her goodness. And she must always act compassionately if he is to love her kindness. But no mortal is capable of so much consistency and self-sacrifice. Similarly, if a woman loves her husband's personality, she will not stare at him admiringly while he is asleep since his personality sleeps too. Yet when she is attracted to him, she need do nothing at all since that animal magnetism is permanently switched on.

This is not to say that physical attraction is everything in marriage. This is the argument of a shallow hedonist which I strongly reject. But physical attraction is the beginning of every relationship, and remains a pivotal component even long after a deep love has grown. Once love has grown, our emotions dress up our beloved so that to us they always appear beautiful, even as they grow older. The magnet of the body is also what leads us to discover the metal of the personality. Physical attraction and love must always work in concert. Physical attraction is the bait of the relationship, whereas love is the hook. Attraction can cause you be inclined toward your spouse. But only love will sew you together as one.

I had the pleasure and privilege of discussing the film *The Mirror Has Two Faces* with Barbra Streisand just when she was considering making it. The central premise of the film is exactly this point: a female professor of literature falls in love with a fellow professor who loves her for her mind. But she is miserable after they marry, because he is not attracted to her body. She doesn't want him to think her intelligent, but rather beautiful. She wants to feel like a woman. She doesn't want him to like only her jokes or her insights into life. Rather, she wants to be wanted by him in her entirety, so that even when she cries or sleeps he feels drawn to her.

### *The power of feeling flattered*

It is indeed curious how easily flattered we all are when members of the opposite sex find us physically sexy. One might have thought that being complimented for our intelligence or wit would mean so much more to us. We are, after all, human, and as a species we pride ourselves on our minds and not our bodies. And yet, a woman wants to be found sexy and attractive, and a man wants to feel irresistible. Of course, being flattered *only* about one's looks is tiresome. But being flattered for being intelligent, well-educated, charming, and of resolute character isn't worth a hill of beans if it isn't paired with the assurance that one has some physical magnetism. No wife would feel flattered if her husband said, 'Honey, I want you to know that I don't find you physically attractive. In fact, you're downright plain. But hell! That rocket-scientist mind of yours makes up for everything!'

The reason we are so flattered by those who love us for our looks and sex appeal, and not just our minds, speech, sense of humour, or kindness, is this: if you love someone's thoughts, speech, or actions, then in essence you love their *projections*; you are in love with their manifestations, the way in which they reveal themselves, how they behave and how they act. You love *what* they do but not *who* they are. But if you love them even without any clothes on, warts and all, even while they lie asleep naked, and in a sexual situation when they are not being articulate or even coherent, then you love them for what they are in their very essence, and not just in the way they act.

Many would argue that I am being superficial in my argument about the importance of the attractiveness of the body. But I am not arguing that we ever overindulge the body at the expense of the soul. The body should be a window to the soul, always pulling us toward the possibility of love with our spouse. And those who denigrate the body and promote the soul have a warped understanding of holiness and spirituality. The purpose of human life is to unearth the spark of God that lurks in every created thing. Our bodies are as holy as our souls, and we must always treat them with the reverence and dignity that a vessel for the divine demands.

## 5

# Sex and traditional thought

*It was partially my fault we got divorced . . . I tended to place my wife under a pedestal.*

Woody Allen

*Bigamy is having one husband too many. Monogamy is the same.*

Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying*, 1974

Let me return again to the question of why I, a Rabbi, am writing about sex. As a Rabbi counselling young people at Oxford University and in London, I have found that relationships are the principal subject that arises. And, yes, I believe fervently in marriage, and that dissatisfaction with physical love is a major cause of divorce.

But the real reason is not a pragmatic but an idealistic one. I write about sex because it is holy. It is as religious a subject as belief in God. It is only through sexual congress that a soul is brought into this world, that a man and woman merge as one, as they were before creation, and it is one of the few mystic experiences of life in which we may all share. This does not mean that it cannot be debased. Indeed, the ancient Jewish mystics were adamant that the loftier the concept, the more it was subject to abuse.

From time immemorial, however, people in general, and religious people in particular, have viewed sex as purely physical and in many cases base and degrading. And this view persists today. Once when I was delivering a lecture in Oxford about the place of sex within society, I mentioned to the student audience what I said in the Foreword, that

now that sex was so readily available, people were finding increasingly little incentive to marry.

The students' reaction to this line of reasoning was extremely hostile. 'Imagine that,' one said, 'of all the superficial, and immature reasons to marry! How shallow and desperate one must be to marry in order to have sex. How degrading.' I couldn't believe my ears. Sex! Shallow and degrading? Superficial and immature? But nearly every other student agreed with him. What if we had used other terms and had said that a man marries a woman because he really wants to get to know her, and intimacy is the only way, would they still have called this knowledge 'degrading'? Of course, they only dismissed the sexual commitment because to them, unlike in the Bible, it involved no higher form of wisdom or enlightenment. Young people today are deprived of higher communion with the objects of their affection because to them sex is only carnal. Walking through the Tate Gallery together is what they would call a far more meaningful experience.

### *The ascetic fallacy*

To the modern and the primitive untrained religious mind it seems only logical to postulate that the more grounded in earthly activity one becomes, and the more one indulges in sensual pleasures, the more one's spirituality decreases and the individual moves away from God. God has no body, doesn't eat or sleep, doesn't marry and certainly does not have sex, heaven forbid.

These people will argue that in order for man to come closer to God he must emulate His ways. 'The meek shall inherit the earth' and 'It is far more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle' are refrains to which we have all become accustomed. By minimising, or, better, eliminating earthly and lustful desires, man naturally comes closer to God. He must fast instead of eating, stay awake and pray and study instead of sleeping, and live a celibate life.

Hence, many religions have argued for denial of the body and a renunciation of material goods as the surest way of entering heaven. Some religions have gone so far as to advocate self-flagellation and the pursuit of a monastic lifestyle as further steps toward reaching heaven while on earth. Catholic clergy can't have sex and Hindus should try to minimise it. I have a Jewish friend who became a Hare Krishna. He and his wife have two children, and he swears that they have only had sex twice.

## *Cherishing our body*

Ancient Jewish thought takes exception to all this. Far from merely allowing sex as a concession to man's primal instincts, or prescribing sex solely as the means for procreation, Judaism has argued from its inception that sex is the holiest experience and undertaking known to man. The very first verse in the Bible reads, 'In the beginning the Lord created the heavens and the earth,' implying that both were equally created by God, 'and God saw all that he had made, and it was good.'

This understanding is crucial. The heavens are no more holy than the earth. It is man's obligation to find God on earth, to discover the transcendent within the immanent, and the spiritual within the physical. Human flesh is holy, and human nature is commensurately holy. We must all learn not just to forgive ourselves for being human, but to revel in and celebrate our humanity. Rather than fighting our nature, we must harness it. Rather than being ashamed of it, we must understand it and develop it to our advantage.

What is holy is, therefore, radically different in Judaism. All of us are conditioned to look upon the citadels of religion as being holy. A synagogue is holy as a church is holy. But

in Judaism some places are holier than others, and the average Jew finds it a far greater privilege, even feels closer to heaven, praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem than at his neighbourhood synagogue. But, similarly, the bedroom can be holier than a synagogue.

In the bedroom we find and experience God through the warmth and closeness of another human being. Through the holiness of marriage, we invite God into our relationship as the spiritual partner who can elevate us above our own earthly constraints so that we can be joined together as one. If we achieve this we can be redeemed through sex.

In a moment of Jewish wit, the Talmud poignantly tells a story about Rabbinical training in which 'Rav Kahana lay hidden under the bed of Rav [his teacher] who was carousing and speaking flippantly with his wife of sexual matters; afterwards Rav had intercourse with her. Rav Kahana said to Rav: "You appear to me to be like a hungry man who has never had sex before, for you act with frivolity in your desire." Rav said to Kahana: "Are you here? Get out! It is improper for you to lie under my bed!" Kahana said to him: "This is a matter of Torah and I must study." '

## *The importance of physical matters*

The outer shell therefore is, in Jewish thought, as important as inner beauty. Oscar Wilde wrote, 'It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.' While Judaism would not go so far as that, it argues that the mystery lies in both the visible and the invisible, in the body and in the soul. According to the Talmud, when the Jews were travelling through the wilderness of Sinai after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, the Almighty instructed Moses and the Jewish nation to build a tabernacle, so that He might dwell in their midst. As part of the guidelines God commanded Moses to build a brass basin for the priests to wash their hands and feet before undertaking work in the sanctuary.

Tradition maintains that Moses found it inappropriate that this basin be made from the daughters of Israel's brass mirrors used in Egypt by the wives. But God overruled Moses and instructed him to make the basin specifically from the mirrors, since it was humble objects like these, that promoted love and intimacy between husband and wife, which were most dear to Him. By the same token the Talmud says that together with the manna, the bread that God caused to rain down from heaven to sustain the Jews through their 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, the Almighty rained down many different kinds of fragrances and perfumes for all the 40 years as well. The great medieval scholar Maimonides even defines a right to lingerie appropriate to sexual activity as part of the 'onah', the conjugal obligations of the husband.

Ultimately it is the body that supersedes the soul in Judaism. A Jew is not merely allowed, but obligated, to desecrate the Sabbath for the health of the body. Even though the soul will suffer, man must compromise the sanctity of the soul for the purposes of the body. We don't exist to achieve holiness in the afterlife, we must aim for it now. And sex is essential to this. 'We attain the greatest spirituality via our physical bodies. This is the basis of Judaism, which shows us how physical pleasures are uplifted and sanctified.' (Tehila Abramov)

## 6

# Love, lust and intimacy

*I believe that it's better to be looked over than it is to be overlooked.*

Mae West

***Have you not as yet observed that pleasure, which is undeniably the sole motive force behind the union of the sex, is nevertheless not enough to form a bond between them? And that, if it is preceded by desire, which impels, it is succeeded by disgust, which repels? That is a law of nature which love alone can alter.***

Pierre Choderols de Laclos

Like the other religions, Judaism has always had great thinkers and writers who have argued for an ascetic Judaism where sexual passion is to be limited and procreation emphasised. In April 1996, while I was visiting one of Britain's leading congregations on a Sabbath morning, the Rabbi of the synagogue launched into a diatribe against Rabbis 'who write about immodest subjects like sex and marriage. When I was young,' he continued, 'my pious Jewish grandmother would not even pronounce the word "sex" or even "pregnancy". Rather, she spoke of a woman being "in the family way". Now we have Rabbis who seek to stake their reputations on it.' I quickly sank low in my seat to avert the stares. 'What dastardly scoundrel could he have been talking about?' I wondered aloud.

Yet ascetic thinkers are right where they emphasise modesty. For sexual passion can only be negotiated through modesty and respect for the other. Sex thrives specifically in a veiled arena, where fantasy and allure are allowed their place. Moreover, without modesty there can be no intimacy. When sex is too public – when it is broadcast to the world – it is then no longer about two people sharing something special and exclusive.

## *The role of modesty*

I was once approached by a 24-year-old religious Jew who had been married for two years. The problem: he and his wife had just had their first child, and his wife was now always tired and their love-life had gone from being fantastic before the birth, to dull shortly after the birth, to non-existent from the baby's six-month birthday and on. The young man said that he had come to see me since he felt there was no one within his community with whom he could discuss these intimate issues.

I must admit that whatever pretensions to open-mindedness I had before the meeting, they were instantly dispelled almost as soon as he began to speak. He spoke of how his wife barely tolerated his nightly advances and had a perpetual headache. Why, she had now even lost the ability to climax, and this made it impossible for him to climax as well. I was taken aback by his immediate openness, as he described the most private details of their intimate life. He spoke of how he had tried this position and that position, this suggestion and that, all to no avail. He had bought her books and left them on her bed, but she had just thrown them out, calling them smut. I found myself stunned into silence, and I didn't know why.

Many secular people had sought my advice before, but never a Chassidic Jew like myself. It bothered me that this young man had no modesty. It bothered me that he could compromise his wife's privacy with such abandon. Even if it was for the purpose of enhancing their love-life, surely there was a better, more subtle way to go about it? Moreover, everything he was saying sounded so artificial. The reason for this soon became clear. Out of a crumpled plastic bag he proceeded to pull about ten books on sexual technique that he had been reading – everything from the *Kama Sutra* to *Secrets of How to Please a Woman in Bed*.

'What are you doing with all this stuff?' I asked him incredulously.

'What do you mean, what am I doing? I'm doing whatever it takes to make our sex life more exciting and save our marriage. Haven't you listened to anything I've been saying? I've tried all this stuff with my wife, but she is just so inhibited. Every time we try something new, she complains it hurts her too much, or she's not in the mood, or she's just tired and wants to go to sleep. Sometimes I wish she would just take the baby and move into her parents' place and leave me alone.'

After some further enquiries, it soon emerged that the reason his wife seemed so tired in the months following the baby's birth was that her husband, the sex guru, had not lifted a finger to help her with all her new-found chores, and she simply couldn't cope. She felt neglected and unloved and she responded by subconsciously turning off in the bedroom. However good his intentions, this young man was wrecking his wife's life and endangering their marriage not because of any problem with her prudishness, but rather because he wanted to be a husband only in the bedroom. Theirs was a crisis of intimacy, not of sex or lust.

Ever since the publication of *The Joy of Sex* by Dr Alex Comfort in 1971, we have been deluged with amazing guidebooks purporting to give us the kind of sexual and sensual pleasure that will have us careering through the ceiling's rafters on the way to the moon, or your money back. It seems odd, however, that none should offer techniques specifically designed to maximise human emotional intimacy. These books can teach us which sexual positions are most enjoyable, but they do not similarly emphasise which are the most conducive to a loving experience whose after-effects will not dissipate with sexual climax. Have you ever pondered the startling truth that even if we watched a couple in the throes of passion, having the most exciting sexual encounter, we still wouldn't necessarily know if they love each other?

## *Don't fall into the trap of equating love with lust*

Whereas love is about wanting to draw closer to someone, lust is about wanting to possess someone. Whereas love is about wanting to hold someone, lust is about wanting to use someone. Whereas love deepens with time, lust is extinguished with time. Whereas love deepens with every encounter, lust is extinguished with even a single encounter. Love is about sharing, while lust is about taking. Love treats the other like a person, lust like an object. With love you try to win the other. With lust you try to possess the other. Love is about mutual surrender, while lust involves a winner and a loser.

The objective therefore is to use sex to generate commitment, not to smother or repress it. Lust leads to sex, and sex leads to love, and love leads to further commitment – and we should not impede that which comes naturally and is healthy. Notice that the Ten Commandments prohibit a man from lusting after his neighbour's wife. The fact that the Bible specifies one's neighbour's wife implies that it is perfectly acceptable to lust after your own wife. Otherwise, the verse could simply have said that it is forbidden to lust after any woman. But lust must be treated as the means to the ends of love.

As I have said, in ancient Jewish thought sexual congress is a metaphor for God's creation of, and interaction with, His world. Sex is said to bring about the celestial unity of masculine and feminine energies. God Himself is said to have masculine and feminine aspects that express themselves as His immanence in history and His transcendence in creation. There is God's finite and limiting energy representing form, and the infinite and unbounded energy of God the Creator, representing substance. The masculine God of history, who intervenes in the ways of the world and fills the world with His light, is represented by a line. The infinite God of creation is represented by a circle, an energy that hovers above the cosmos, sustaining and animating the universe constantly. When the circle and the line are joined together there is a burst and creation of life.

Lest we believe that there are two gods, two distinct energies, a Creator of men and a separate Creator of women – that the God of history is not the same as the God of creation – the fact that the two genders unite in sexual congress shows that really God is one and that both male and female emanate from different aspects of the same God. Sex, in both a literal and a cosmological sense, demonstrates the underlying unity of creation. It is for this reason that Judaism has always identified sex as the most holy of all human endeavours. Our world was created as an arena to demonstrate the unity of God, and no other act demonstrates this better than the physical union of male and female, strangers who become lovers, and lovers who are also friends.

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PART TWO

# Sexual Techniques: the Mechanics of Sex

## 1

# Can men and women really enjoy sex together?

*Marriage is the price men pay for sex; sex is the price women pay for marriage.*

Anonymous

*After fifteen years of marriage, they finally achieved sexual compatibility. They both had a headache.*

Anonymous

*My wife doesn't. Understand me?*

Anonymous

I once asked a gynaecologist in Oxford, who would sometimes attend my lectures, whether he agreed that loss of passion was the greatest impediment to marital bliss. He responded with an emphatic 'No'. 'The greatest problem with sex is that men are so impatient. They just want to get on with the business, irrespective of whether the woman is ready. You should see the women who come to me for treatment, Shmuley, with torn tissue because men want to have sex with them before they are even prepared. They don't care if the women are enjoying it, or even if they're in pain. I'd say this is the most common problem I deal with, especially for single women.'

## *Gender differences*

In spite of this clear difference in sexual temperament, up until the publication and phenomenal success of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* it was almost impossible for anyone to make any mention of differences between men and women without being clobbered for it. Since then, an avalanche of studies has spelled out just how different men and women are in day-to-day life, and innumerable books have been published on different male and female expectations of dating, relationships, marriage, and love. It might even be said that the whole science of male–female relationships today revolves around trying to find harmony and build a bridge across the natural, biological divide.

Surprisingly, however, how incredibly different men and women are sexually still receives little attention. Specifically, the greatest problem of all, namely, the difficulty they have in achieving satisfaction together, when that satisfaction is achieved in such radically different ways, is ignored. This is the more surprising since these differences are so obvious. Men always complain of women who 'just lie there' and don't participate sufficiently in the sexual act, while women, especially wives, complain of men who just want 'quickies' and do not focus on wooing their wives into sex. This accounts for the disappointing sexual routine of most married couples. A recent study showed that although married couples have sex twice a week on average, the average length of each sexual encounter is 13 minutes (most readers are now saying, 'Really, that long!').

According to *Sex in America*, it is women who experience far greater problems of sexual satisfaction and interest than men. While only 16 per cent of men lack interest in sex, an astonishing 35 per cent of women regularly have no interest. And while only 7 per cent of men are unable to orgasm during sex, a sizeable 34 per cent of women have a chronic difficulty. Only 3 per cent of men experience pain during sex, while 15 per cent of women complain of ongoing sexual discomfort. In addition, 19 per cent of women experience problems with lubrication. By contrast, the only sexual problems that men generally experience are anxiety about performance (15 per cent), and premature ejaculation (29 per cent).

## *Patient sex*

The simple fact is that men seem interested in sex, while women want romance and love. For women foreplay is a glorious part of the act. Recent statistics show that 79 per cent of women enjoy the caressing and hugging involved in foreplay far more than sex itself, whereas 83 per cent of men see foreplay as nothing but the prelude to sex. For them romance is a road which leads to sex, and who wants to waste time on the road?

How then did the Creator expect men and women to enjoy sex together when they have such different sexual metabolisms? Men must exert considerable control to slow themselves down if they are to achieve the same pace as the woman they are with. And the lack of sexual passion in marriage, which has come to be the leading cause of divorce, is directly attributable to men who don't take the time to romance their wives.

The only answer to this question is that God intended us to practise sex where the focus is not on pleasure, but on *the achievement of unity and symmetry between man and woman*. God requires from us a situation where a husband is not interested in ejaculation and climax so much as in finding a shared rhythm in sex with his wife. The focus needs to be on harmony and intimacy rather than on mere pleasure or reproduction.

### *Sex, a hot-line to your wife*

In order for the sexual act to be fully pleasurable and fulfilling for both participants, a man cannot just climb on his wife in some disguised form of autoeroticism. He must ensure that the crest of their sexual wave is arched in a manner where his wife can join him on its peak. And if he rushes things, he will end up the loser, because she will lose her interest and no husband will be excited by a wife who is bored of sex with him or who is insufficiently stimulated and is thus a lesser participant in the act.

To be in harmony, we must see sex as an exalted form of communication where the participants are constantly gauging each other's rate of response. Sex must become a form of knowledge, as in the Bible – which has no word for sex apart from 'knowledge': 'And Adam came to know his wife Eve.' Unlike animals, as humans we are capable of showing our sexual partner patience as a sign that we cherish and want to get to know him or her better; that we understand that they comprise not just a delectable body, but also an attractive personality. When a husband slows down in sex and focuses intensely on his wife's beauty, her interest, and especially her response, he does just that. It means that he is not just selfishly rushing on to her; he is taking time for her instead of merely masturbating on her.

### *The downward spiral toward adultery*

This sexual harmony will help prevent the onset of infidelity which affects all too many marriages. Since a man's libido seems to thrive on horizontal rather than vertical renewal, what most men want in sex is new flesh and new partners. They are not naturally monogamous, and they quickly tire of the same body in sex. Women, however, thrive on vertical renewal. They do not seek new bodies so much as deeper and more loving expressions occurring within the same

relationship. They want to try many new things and explore different methods of communication with the same man.

This gender difference leads to a downward spiral in many marriages that goes something like this. A couple marry after falling in love. Their first year together is filled with romance and excitement. They pleasure each other physically, go out a lot, and seem entirely focused on each other. By the second year this slows down somewhat, and by the third year they have entered a predictable cycle of work and keeping up with the frenetic activity of modern life. They raise the kids and take out the rubbish. They don't have as much time for each other, and the spark begins to be lost from their marriage.

But because he is a man, the husband's eye begins to wander. It is not that he cheats. Rather, he is not nearly as focused on his wife as he once was. She feels this and begins to resent it. Her irritation builds as she notices the inordinate attention he begins to pay other women, and how he admires their beauty and body parts. She dresses up for him, but his mind still seems focused elsewhere. Even when he is here, he is not fully here. He does not even listen to her fully when she speaks. She becomes increasingly resentful. The more distracted he seems, the more hostile she becomes.

As part of her self-defence mechanism, she lashes out at him more and more, and becomes critical of his actions. She begins to find fault with everything he does. He begins to shout at her that she makes him feel he can't do anything right. Everything he does, she finds unworthy. He becomes consumed with self-pity, and convinces himself that he deserves some warmth. He begins to speak more to the woman across from his desk in the office whom he has always found attractive anyway.

His guilt is mitigated by the fact that he dismisses his wife as uncaring. The other woman is very complimentary to him. He starts paying her a lot of attention. She catches him staring at her frequently, and he notices that she is always telling him how wonderful he is. Soon, he thinks to himself, 'Why is my wife not this nice to me? Why does this stranger think I'm special, but my own wife treat me with such derision?' Rather than think that his lack of affection and attention toward his wife has caused her to express her pain through antagonism and bitterness, he instead faults her as a cold, selfish, and unconcerned woman.

## *A couple's conjugal duties*

This process must be nipped in the bud by both spouses, though the problem lies mainly with men. Many husbands think that they can ignore their wives outside the bedroom, and yet expect them to perform in the bedroom. This doesn't work. A wife who isn't romanced during the day is not going to feel loving at night. Often, she will even resist her husband's advances, and refuse to allow him to touch her. But when a man and a woman have a very healthy sex life, and seek to bring harmony to their vastly differing libidos, they ensure that they do not need to find sexual satisfaction outside the marriage.

This blind spot of husbands is not new. Throughout history sex has always been treated as a man's right and a woman's duty. Whether or not women enjoyed sex was immaterial. They existed for the man's pleasure and women were seen as immoral if they enjoyed themselves. Prior to the 18th century the female orgasm remained an undiscovered mystery. Dr William Acton still wrote in 1857, concerning a female patient, 'She assured me that she felt no sexual passions whatever. Her passion for her husband was of a platonic kind, and far from wishing to stimulate his frigid feelings, she doubted whether it would be right or not.'

## *Sexual desire in the Bible*

Yet for those who know the Bible, female sexual desire is nothing new. The Talmud declared two thousand years ago that a woman's sexual passion is far greater than that of a man. Indeed, Nachmanides (1194–1270), one of the greatest Jewish scholars, explains in his commentary on the Bible that when God declared that Eve would long for Adam after eating from the tree of knowledge, 'craving [*teshukah*] represents an exceedingly great sexual desire for her husband'.

Religion is often portrayed as encouraging women to subdue any trace of sexual longing. But the Bible conceives of sex within marriage as the woman's right and the man's duty. Far from denying the sexual component of female desire, the Torah actually obligates a man to pleasure his wife to the point where she reaches sexual climax before him. For a man to have sex with his wife without affording her pleasure is an abuse. The Rabbis wrote about sex that the 'mitzvah of onah' (conjugal relations) is regarded as both a need and a pleasure especially of women (*baalei hanefesh, shaar hakedusha*). Sex is not a luxury of marriage but its most basic necessity.

Under Jewish law a wife's contentment is the key to sexual harmony as sex is the most central element of marriage. The Bible records three fundamental unqualified rights that a woman possesses in marriage: food, clothing/shelter, and conjugal rights. But only if either husband or wife withholds sex from the other over a period of time are they immediately dubbed to be a *mored*, or *moredes*, a 'rebellious spouse'. A Jewish court would grant the aggrieved party an immediate divorce.

'This is because "onah" [the sexual rights],' the Rabbis explain, 'is the essence of marriage and to withhold romance and sex from a spouse is to cause them physical pain. Food and clothing can be handled in court, but a withdrawal from "onah" is a functional termination of married life.' And conjugal relations must be pleasurable to the woman, for without pleasure, the Rabbis explain, there is no bonding. It is for this reason that that Iggeret Hakodesh, a 14th-century 'letter' written from a pious sage to his son on the occasion of his marriage, encourages a man to exert every effort to pleasure his wife:

> *You should begin with words that will draw her heart to you and will settle her mind and make her happy . . .*
>
> *Tell her things which will produce in her desire, attachment, love, willingness, and passion . . .*
>
> *Win her heart with words of charm and seduction . . .*
>
> *Never have sex with your wife while she is sleepy, for your minds will not be unified . . .*
>
> *Never hasten to arouse her desire . . .*
>
> *Begin in a pleasing manner of love, so that she will achieve satisfaction before you.*

We can still learn from this. For one of the things that has most undermined sex in the modern age is the complete focus on the body, to the exclusion of everything else. In areas of the flesh, men and women are indeed different, but in areas of the personality and the soul, they can become one. This is why pleasure is so central, because enjoyment and passion elicit our total character and call forth our complete participation, which can turn into the deepest form of knowledge.

## 2

# Is there a kosher *Kama Sutra*?

*If the psyche is unwilling, no amount of technique can persuade it; and if the psyche is willing, no lack of technique can dissuade it.*

Ann Aldrich

*There's no norm in sex. Norm is the name of a guy who lives in Brooklyn.*

Dr Alex Comfort

Katie and Peter were married for seven years. They had a deep love for each other, but both felt that the fire had gone from their marriage. Previously, they had never tried anything too kinky in their sex lives, because there was no need for it. They had both felt extremely satisfied. But now they decided to experiment with every new sexual position, in the car, in the kitchen. He even bought a motorbike so they could try it on that. Surely novelty and experimentation would do the trick, Peter thought.

And it worked. But only for Peter. He found new life by instigating new sexual techniques in their marriage. But Katie felt that while things were more exciting, they were no longer as close. Peter became frustrated with his wife's preference for missionary-position sex. 'My husband thinks I'm a prude, but there is something beautiful in making love while looking into your husband's eyes. I want to see how much he is enjoying me.'

### *Spicy sex*

There can be no doubt. Sexual experimentation, such as Peter's in this example, has received bucket-loads of attention over the past few decades. The *Kama Sutra*, with its hundreds of sexual positions, has enjoyed a revival as a classic, its myriad positional possibilities perceived by many as a means to escape the boredom of the same old sexual routine. Most people are convinced, however, that religion, being totally prudish about sex, would of course insist on the missionary position rather than on something really kinky and exciting such as, say, penetration from behind.

But I agree that couples should leave no stone unturned in their sexual repertoire, always renewing the spontaneity and freshness of their relationship. Anything that enhances the love, excitement, and intimacy of a marriage, while not compromising its sanctity or modesty, is a good thing. Seen from this perspective, the *Kama Sutra* – its explicit nature aside – can be a kosher book.

In this respect, Peter was absolutely justified in trying every new thing to bring excitement back into his marriage. Judaism, however, while agreeing with his enthusiasm, also insists that among the various experimental sexual positions there should be one principal position: the missionary position.

### *Total unity*

Jewish sexual laws revolve around a constant attempt to promote and sustain emotional intimacy of married couples through physical intimacy. It is easy to appreciate how the missionary position leads to this closeness and familiarity. In no other sexual position do we see a meeting of the mouths accompanied by a full integration of all the limbs. Not only are husband and wife locked together in the genital region, but they coalesce in their totality so that even in appearance they become as one.

The ancient Rabbis draw our attention to the fact that humans are the only creatures who make love facing each other. And biologists have suggested that the size of the human penis – which is proportionately far larger than that of most mammals – is to enable humans to have sexual intercourse in a face-to-face position (and who said size doesn't matter?). The Zohar, the most important work of the Cabalah, Jewish mysticism, adds to this that every person has three essential components: body, spirit, and soul. The body is our husk (*klipah*), the spirit is our life-force, and the soul is the spark of God serving as a kind of umbilical cord connecting us to the divine, and the missionary position unites a husband and wife on all three levels. In the missionary position, a couple can kiss and exchange the breath of life (*ruchos*). They can whisper in each other's ear, and thereby unite their spirits (*nefashos*), and they can hold each other, their bodies (*gufim*) becoming one flesh.

In the missionary position we can utter words of affection that would otherwise be closed off to us. As we embrace we hold onto each other's backs, demonstrating that we love and accept every part of our lover – not only their intelligence and facial beauty, but even something as humble as their back. (And women have stated in study after study that what they enjoy most in sex is this physical embrace.) Other sexual positions, while they may be pleasurable, can only close off outlets for some or all other types of union: verbal, mental, or even emotional.

Through our direct eye-to-eye contact we feel and discover the essence and beauty of our partners. All of us hate being stared at, and in everyday social situations we avoid direct eye-to-eye contact as much as possible. There is so much truth in our eyes that we feel naked and unmasked. But peering deep into our spouse's eyes allows us the ultimate perception of their irreducible essence.

### *Complete surrender*

What the missionary position affords us is a physical means by which total surrender can be achieved. When I was a kid in school we would test whether or not our friends really trusted us by asking them to fall backward while we stood behind to catch them. If they were prepared to fall all the way, then they trusted us. But if they would move a foot at the last minute and catch themselves, then we felt we were not trusted. Relationships too require a metaphorical 'fall' in order to ascertain trust. It involves total, as opposed to incremental, surrender.

If you love someone then you are prepared to fall into their arms without any reservations or safety-nets, because the underlying premise of your love is your confidence that they will never hurt you and will only do what is truly in your interest and to your benefit. And what is absolutely indispensable to complete surrender is trust.

Lack of trust is what I believe to be one of the major causes of the deterioration and breakdown of marriage. Marriage today is not about total surrender so much as focused submission. We abdicate part or parts of ourselves rather than all of ourselves. Modern society revolves so strongly around independence and self-reliance that we never seem to depend entirely upon even our husbands and wives.

Marriage is no longer an act of complete capitulation, but rather an incremental acquiescence. We are prepared to offer into the marriage those aspects of ourselves and our lives that we would agree are integral to the endeavour, but never any more. But the problem with this focused surrender is that, since neither party is willing to let go completely, you never truly become one unit.

Most sexual positions are flawed like this partial surrender in that they bring together genital and other erogenous zones but never effect a complete orchestration of the entire body. The lovers have connected, but only on

one plane. They have had sex, but they have not made love. They have only surrendered a region of their bodies, a geographical part of themselves, or a single dimension of their personalities. They have had a great time, but each at different times and at different moments. Rates of breathing and verbal utterances, the digging of nails and the clawing of flesh can all serve as a gauge of our partner's state of arousal, but these are no substitute for looking into their eyes.

## 3

# Your spouse: a friend or a lover?

*Platonic friendship – the interval between the introduction and the first kiss.*

Sophie Irene Loeb

*I have always detested the belief that sex is the chief bond between man and woman. Friendship is far more human.*

Agnes Smedley

*Love is a matter of chemistry. Sex is physics.*

Anonymous

*Husbands are chiefly good lovers when they are betraying their wives.*

Marilyn Monroe

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One of the rules of dating is that when a man tires of a woman (or in many cases when a woman tires of a man), he cannot simply call her up and end it. No, that would be too heartless and cruel. Rather, dumping her comes in the form of the famous let's-be-friends phone call. 'I really like you,' he tells her. 'But I like you as a friend. I love you more like a sister.' Or, 'I really like you, but the lab results have just returned and I only have four weeks to live, and I'd like to spend it with my pets.' Or, 'I'm crazy about you. But I've decided that I'm just not good enough for you. So, I've found a new woman in my life who is far less perfect.' I even know a man who told a girlfriend he wanted to ditch that he had just discovered that he was gay and had fallen in love with

his best friend. Excuses aside, in the world at large everyone is supposed to understand that lovers cannot also be friends. Yet, amazingly, when it comes to marriage people believe that entirely different rules apply.

## *Friends in marriage*

In my years of counselling couples, I have encountered two kinds of marriage. First, there are couples who trust each other implicitly and explicitly. They are each other's confidant and most trusted companion. They share every secret and they depend and rely on each other utterly. No wedge can be driven between them because they are inseparable. They have friends outside the marriage, but they relate to their friends as a single unit, as a couple. They are therefore more friendly with couples than they are with individual men and women. Communication is the norm in such marriages, not lovemaking. Their union is based far more on compatibility – similar interests – than on raw physical attraction.

These couples lack no intimacy in their life. So what's their problem?

There is little or no passion. They have great conversations, but when they undress in the bedroom the newspaper comes out and the television is immediately switched on. Theirs is a love like water, not like fire. The fact that it is not a passionate relationship has both positive and negative aspects. There is deep trust and they rarely argue. Why would they fight? They have no fire. They do not make each other's blood boil. But since there is no flame, their marriage is predictable.

## *Lovers in marriage*

Then there are the husbands and wives who are lovers. Theirs is a passionate, fiery union. They fight and argue constantly. They do not, however, completely love or even trust each other. When they need advice about important life-decisions, they do not seek it from each other. There is little calm in their marriage, but there is plenty of fire. They have a great intensity of emotion toward each other.

They are constantly arguing and making up, with great passion and fervour. Their lovemaking sessions are wonderful. But they can't seem to get along and truly communicate outside the bedroom. They have physical knowledge, but not emotional intimacy. The wife has her friends, and the husband has his. They don't often do things as a couple, and when they do, it is for a specific reason. They love each other, but they don't necessarily like each other. They don't share similar tastes and they are not similar types. They love each other passionately, but they also get on each other's nerves. There is nothing dull about their marriage, but there is nothing serene about it either.

## *How we achieve both*

For a marriage to be a success, it must somehow fuse together conflicting opposites. A successful marriage requires both fire and water; it must synthesise the contradictory ingredients of passion and intimacy. We do indeed want our spouse to be both our lover and our best friend. And this is what kosher sex is all about. For kosher sex is passionate lovemaking which leads to intimacy. There are moments in our life where we want novelty, romance, passion, and excitement. We want our spouse to whisk us to Kathmandu for a romantic weekend. We want to jump from hotel to hotel, ripping each other's clothes off, laughing giddily as we stroll down the Champs-Élysées hand in hand. But there is another side to marriage as well.

After a couple of weeks of hotels and living on airplanes, we want to come home to the serenity, comfort and predictability of our own home. At least half our life we wish not for novelty but for sameness. We want a marriage where we can talk and exchange thoughts. We want companionship and friendship. We wish to share our life with a spouse who makes us not only career through the rafters of the ceiling, but grow intellectually and emotionally, someone with whom we can not only rush to the bedroom, but build an entire home. In short, we desire calmness amidst the frequent storms.

No marriage is truly successful or fulfilling unless both these opposites are accommodated. But fire and water cancel each other out. So how can we achieve both simultaneously?

## *Joining fiery and watery love*

Recognising this dilemma, the Bible, more than three millennia ago, ingeniously offered a solution. Every month, there must be two weeks devoted to physical love, and two weeks devoted to intellectual communication and emotional intimacy. And what better cycle to follow then the exact rhythm of the female body itself. While husband and wife are permitted to each other and indulge in sex for two weeks they will forge deep emotional bonds. Their passionate physical life deepens their emotion and feeling for each other.

When the woman's menses begin, their two weeks are up – just before monotony sets in. They must separate for the five days of menstruation and for seven days thereafter and maintain a period of strict sexual abstinence. During this period they will be able to capitalise on everything that has been achieved in their physical union, transmuting the relationship onto a deeper emotional and intellectual plane. They develop the friendship side of their marriage and they focus on discovering the personality rather than the flesh.

Feeding off each other's minds rather than bodies, they talk instead of caress, share secrets instead of kiss, and discuss each other's work-day. Focusing on their life outside the bedroom, they can discuss the children, their plans for a family holiday, their business relationships and their relationship with their respective parents. It is a rhythm that is healthy for the woman and accords with the natural impulses that accompany menstruation. Many women have an innate aversion to sex during menstruation. A period of abstention allows the wall of the uterus to rebuild itself and means that the woman does not have to accommodate her husband sexually at a time of physical discomfort.

As the days pass by and they begin to hunger for each other, they don't immediately follow their instincts and grab for each other. Rather, they allow their non-physical communication to build up into an intense longing for each other. Their libidinous reserve replenishes itself until, days after they have separated, their love for each other reaches its crescendo, and they unite in fiery physical bliss. Like the time when they first married, they enjoy a monthly honeymoon in which they discover each other's bodies as if for the first time.

To symbolise this imminent rebirth, on the night of their reunion with their husbands, orthodox Jewish women go to a *mikveh*, a small ritual pool of water, where they immerse themselves after the 12-day separation. Emerging from the water pool is a symbol of physical regeneration and spiritual renewal, which leads a woman back to her husband like a bride to a groom, reminding them of the enormous passion they experienced when they first discovered the pleasures of the flesh. It is a totally private affair. No one is present, save for a female *mikveh* attendant, which reflects the beautiful feminine mystique and hidden charms of sexual eroticism.

### *Marriage is meant to be exciting*

Couples who truly wish to become lovers but also best friends must develop these two antithetical dimensions of their marriage. Anything else is a recipe for regularity which snuffs out the excitement of marriage. We are emotional beings, and routine ultimately bores us. Too many couples try to make their marriages proceed along a straight line. They share a bed constantly, and wonder why their sex life loses its spark after a short while. They have sex several times a week, with no break, and wonder why it comes in short, forgettable spasms. In truth, people cannot proceed straight, but rather must tack like a sailboat between passion and intimacy.

This marriage pattern also helps in attaining harmony between the male and the female libido. As mentioned earlier, men have a very short sexual attention span, and quickly tire of an available body that provides no adventure and can be conquered without a chase. The period of sexual abstention provides a constant challenge whereby a husband lusts and hungers for his unavailable wife, rather than chasing after his forbidden secretary. He will never tire of his wife's body, because for two weeks of each month her flesh remains outside his grasp, ever elusive, beckoning him for more. And when his wife finally becomes available, he makes passionate love to her for two weeks until he is indeed satiated, and does not feel he needs any other body. And so the cycle repeats itself.

## 4

# Is oral sex wrong?

*The 1950s were ten years of foreplay.*
Germaine Greer

*Sex is not some sort of pristine, reverent ritual.*
*You want reverence and pristine, go to church.*
Cynthia Heimel

We are all sexual creatures, and to try and stifle our innate sexuality is mistaken at best, and hazardous at worst. It was Sigmund Freud who first warned us of the dangers of repressing our sexual nature. Likewise, in the Cabalah, the Jewish esoteric disciplines, the emotions are compared to flowers which are planted by the gardener, representing the intellect. An emotion that grows without guidance, without a gardener, is a weed. It is an unseemly and destructive emotion. And the trick is to have our mind channel and direct emotions, instead of suppressing them, so that they attach us to the right things and repel us from the wrong things.

## *Channelling sexual energy*

In marriage this is equally true. It is perhaps more difficult because we have to tend to it together, but a couple must always try to accommodate each other's sexual needs, even if at times this may seem distasteful. To make their marriage work, they have to try to find sexual harmony.

I once received a surprise call from a very religious Jew, Joseph, who asked if he could come up from the south of

England to discuss a personal problem. He was 23 years old and had recently married a girl his age who was also very religious. He arrived without his wife, and we met in my living room where he closed all the doors and the windows, making sure that no one could listen. 'I need your help. Being religious I did, of course, remain a virgin until I married, and so I have a lot of pent-up sexual energy. I want to try everything, but my wife feels disgusted with some of the things I've suggested. When I asked her for oral sex, she started to cry and accused me of degrading her. Does she prefer that I fantasise about doing it with strangers? I may be religious, but I'm also a man.'

Can a husband and wife who entertain such vastly different ideas about sex still love each other and find great happiness? Many religious people feel an innate sense of discomfort with any sexual practice that is not strictly missionary-position sex, or what they refer to as 'natural'. They are of the mistaken opinion that sex is only for procreation and that it is a sin to derive pleasure from sex. This question is especially important in an age in which so many non-religious husbands and wives erroneously attribute the problems in their marriage to sexual incompatibility.

## *Sexual focus*

What both sides forget is that shared pleasure in sex is the corner-stone of marriage. As I have said, when practised with sanctity, love, and commitment, far from being an animalistic act, sex is humankind's loftiest pursuit where a man and a woman, freed from all inhibition, can capture each other's essence. The core Jewish teaching on marital sex is that a fulfilling sex life is essential to a healthy marriage and prudishness has no place between two committed adults.

In Judaism, the Rabbis specifically point out that the human female is the only species in existence who can cohabit when she is pregnant, demonstrating conclusively that for humans sex is not just about procreation. And the Zohar adds beautifully that the Sabbath candles are a symbol of a wife's ability to rekindle her husband's lust and passion for her.

God wishes for husbands and wives to be truly happy together. 'Had sexual relations been only physical,' the medieval Rabbi Menachem Meiri argued, 'the Bible would not have referred to them as *yediah* [knowledge].' But this cannot be achieved by throwing in more and more sexual prohibitions that limit a couple's sexual repertoire beyond the already very difficult constraints of strict monogamy. To add an unnecessary prudishness is sometimes to invite disaster in marriage and inhibit a couple's bonding process. Total sexual focus on our spouse is the ultimate form of holy sex. The great Biblical commentator Rashi writes that the true connection between husband and wife cannot be achieved without pleasure, 'since if she does not enjoy intimacy she will not cleave to him'.

### *Asceticism*

None the less, some religious people may counter that pleasure may be the central ingredient of marriage, but it should be achieved only through the missionary position. Many students of Jewish thought will cite the Code of Jewish Law which advises husbands and wives to minimise direct oral contact with the genitals; or the rulings that say that for a man to kiss his wife in the genital region is lewd, thereby prohibiting cunnilingus, and that wasted seed is a severe transgression, thereby prohibiting oral sex on a man.

But to see these pronouncements as laws is simply a travesty of the truth. In Judaism the more conservative sexual rulings are given only as advice. The great medieval Jewish codifier Maimonides who, while advising husbands and wives to abstain from an overindulgence in nonmissionary sex, writes that the actual law is: 'A man's wife is permitted to him and therefore, whatever he and his wife wish to pursue sexually, they may do. They may have intercourse whenever it pleases them and he may kiss any organ he wishes, and he may have intercourse in a natural or unnatural manner.'

The Rabbis did not say that a man should not look at his wife's genitals, but rather that he should not *stare*, because all too many men degrade a woman by reducing her to a small number of erogenous zones to the neglect of her total personality. We should be concerned above all else with holistic matrimonial unity rather than a base obsession with lower bodily parts in which no man or woman is distinguished as an individual. Staring at genitals leads to erotic parts of the body losing their mystique and becoming as unexciting as an elbow. But there will be times when seeing your partner's body is essential to erotic arousal, and the Rabbis never intended to mechanise sex to the point where spontaneity is snuffed out.

Similarly oral sex. While it is true that wilful destruction of seed is a severe Biblical prohibition, known as onanism, this applies in cases where husbands go out of their way to avoid insemination and destroy seed – as in the case of coitus interruptus, where withdrawal actually lessens pleasure and is done only to ensure that one's wife does not become pregnant. The Biblical prohibition is, in fact, mentioned where Onan withdrew from his sister-in-law Tamar because he refused to have a child that would be named after his dead brother. But in oral sex the purpose is not to destroy seed. Rather it is to try something new and pleasurable, something that will cause husband and wife to increase their dependency on each other, and lessen their dependency on strangers. To repeat: Judaism opposes the wilful destruction of seed, but not sexual practices that may sometimes involve the *spilling* of seed, but which are pursued for purposes of pleasuring husband and wife.

## *Sexual repression through religion*

Every so often we are scandalised when we read of very religious people having cavorted with prostitutes or cheating on their spouse. We read of members of the clergy being accused of child sexual abuse, or found with child pornographic materials.

I have the greatest pity for religious individuals who make these terrible errors, because most of the time they are indeed devout and pious. But they themselves have suppressed, or are being asked to repress, the strongest aspects of human nature. This is simply impossible. If we heard of monks who took vows of starvation, where they were not allowed to eat or drink for a week at a time, and then discovered that they had been caught secretly drinking water, we would not be surprised because we know how impossible it is to live without food or drink. The same is true of our sexual nature. It cannot be ignored.

Unhealthy repression is bound to exhibit itself in illicit behaviour. Likewise, importing within marriage a religious sexual piety beyond the reasonable and legal limits of the actual ancient teachings is counterproductive to the bonding experience. The definition of holiness in sex is anything that serves to bring a husband and wife closer together, barring intentional destruction of seed (and sex during menstruation and a week thereafter). But barriers that separate a husband and wife should always be avoided.

The religious wife in the story that began this chapter has, of course, every right to refrain from oral sex if it is something she personally feels uncomfortable with, and a husband should never push his wife to do anything that repels her. But that still doesn't mean that he can't try, lovingly, to be persuasive about doing things that will bring them mutual pleasure. Yet neither spouse should base their objections to a sexual position on piety, because religion desires husbands and wives to be totally satisfied with each other sexually. Far from being an exalted level of piety,

prudishness in marriage is a sin which might push spouses to explore, either directly or through fantasy, other possibilities outside the marriage.

5

# Married people and masturbation

*Masturbation is the thief of love.*

Tim and Beverly Lehaye

*Don't knock it. It's sex with someone you love.*

Woody Allen

*A woman occasionally is quite a serviceable substitute for masturbation. It takes an abundance of imagination, to be sure.*

Karl Kraus (1868–1962)

Once during an Oxford debate, my opponent, a psychosexual counsellor, launched a diatribe against me for offering that masturbation lessens our dependency on our partners. She was adamant that, on the contrary, the more we masturbate, the better our sex lives become. 'Practice makes perfect,' as she said numerous times. 'People who don't masturbate are the most sexually repressed people around and they are also the worst lovers and have not begun to surmount corrosive sexual inhibitions.' Moreover, she said, frequent masturbation allows us to experience pleasure and discover what is most gratifying to us. 'Those who do not masturbate do not know themselves.'

For most of us, however, the issue is less high-principled, if not downright banal. David, a chairman of a multi-national corporation whom I came to know through the L'Chaim Society, favoured masturbation because he travelled constantly and was sometimes out of the country for six weeks at a time. Although he was trying to become more religious, he scoffed at any prohibition against masturbation.

'Tell me what you think is better, Shmuley. I have to go on long business trips. We have two small children at home, so my wife cannot always accompany me. Is it better that I sleep with strange women while I'm away, or that I masturbate to those blue movies they have in hotels nowadays? I would never cheat on my wife, but I'm not made of wood. I need some sort of sexual release.'

His argument gave me an opening. 'Who says that you are meant to be away from your wife for weeks at a time because of business? You are telling me that you're not made of wood and you need sexual release. You get it through autoeroticism which allows you to be away from your wife for a long time. But if you refrained and had no sexual outlet other than your wife, you would have to come home. Your marriage is more important than your business, and your sexual dependency on your wife, when she is your only outlet, reminds you of that always.'

### *Masturbation isn't worth it*

Masturbation is certainly not kosher. But since virtually every world religion incorporates some prohibition of masturbation, most people who come across these prohibitions are convinced that they represent everything that is primitive and antiquated. The same conclusion is drawn from the fact that society invented its own taboos against masturbation, such as the myth that if people masturbate, they will go blind or enormously increase the size of their genitalia (sorry guys, it doesn't work). As a result, in the modern world those who don't masturbate are considered about as enlightened as cavemen.

The most common modern argument in favour of masturbation, and one which is advanced almost exclusively by female experts, is that (a) it is entirely unfair that a woman should have to serve as her husband's exclusive outlet for sex, and (b) a wife should not have to wait for her husband to pleasure her, which most of the time he fails to do anyway. Many women especially hate 'the quickies', whereby a husband initiates the sexual act with no thought whatsoever as to whether his wife is even interested.

Why should a wife have to suffer through these most casual encounters? Isn't it far better for a husband who craves sexual release to go off and masturbate, instead of forcing his wife to undress for something that barely involves her? Likewise, why should a wife have to wait for her husband to make her feel good?

## *Technically faithful husbands*

Granted, David's recourse to masturbation is far better than sleeping with his female colleagues or secretaries. But even so, by his actions he is making a grave mistake. What he is doing is not neutral and harmless, but rather has grave consequences for his marriage. One of the most beautiful moments of marriage is when a husband and wife who have been forcibly separated, for business or other reasons, and have longed and looked forward to being together in the same bed again, finally reunite. There are few moments as passionate or as powerful as that when all the pent-up sexual pleasure erupts.

David, however, is allowing all of his sexual steam to escape through cracks and creaks. He is not building up any libidinous sexual reserve, all of which could later be focused exclusively on his wife for intense pleasure. And imagine how his wife feels. If he were not sitting in front of these blue movies which serve as a sexual vent, he would return voraciously hungry for her. He would grab her when they arrived home in private, and she would feel like the most desirable woman in the world.

But as it is, he arrives home, after releasing himself on several occasions, gives her a little peck on the cheek, asks what's for dinner, and jumps in bed to watch television, and their life remains unmarked by their long separation. In a sense, then, he has cheated on his wife because he is meant to make her feel loved and attractive. He has failed to produce the goods.

Enjoying is not the same as *needing*, and I don't think that today's men and women depend on each other nearly as much as in the past. Indeed they fear doing so. This is why, when things get rough, relationships so frequently crumble. Two people who need each other don't run to the divorce courts whenever they have a problem. They cannot conceive of life without each other.

## *Marital fights*

A true test of the health of any marriage is the effects that fighting has on the participants. If husbands and wives can go days on end without making up – if he can sleep on the living-room couch with no inner compunction to come back to his wife's bed – their marriage is in serious trouble. But if they cannot work or concentrate until they make up – if they can't sleep through the night after a quarrel – even if this sometimes means that they continue to have more heated exchanges because they are obsessed with their current estrangement, the marriage is strong.

This very deep kind of love may not express itself through the couple drooling over each other in airport lounges. On the contrary, it is far more deeply rooted than that. But it does express itself in the form of a profound dependency, a helplessness and vulnerability that only one's spouse can satisfy.

It cannot be denied that when we make our spouse into our principal and, hopefully, only sexual outlet, we will treat them far better and act far more nicely. And just as you never shout at your bank manager because you need him, you never shout at your wife because you need her for pleasure and excitement. And if she withholds her sexual favours because she is upset, you have nowhere else to go. So you'd better kiss and make up. The alternative of finding an ongoing outlet in masturbation makes our libido into a punctured balloon, slowly losing all its steam, that has no ability to rise.

When our sex drive is interrupted it no longer has the strength to propel us to our spouse. David in the story above told me of the deteriorating state of his marriage. He then began to analyse its causes. 'We're fighting a lot more now than ever before. Part of the reason, I guess, is all the pressures we have. We both work, and with two kids and a mortgage, we blow off a lot of steam in each other's direction.' But then he said, in a moment of total honesty, 'I also find that I argue with my wife far more when I masturbate.' But when he really wants sex this need expresses itself in the very sensitive way that he treats her.

Masturbation is not a solitary practice, or a private matter with which public pronouncements on morality are unconcerned. It lessens the necessity for physical closeness which one human being feels for another, and in the context of marriage this is disastrous.

## 6

# Should sex be used to mend bridges?

*More than a physical trip, lovemaking, to me, is a mind healer. It erases all the tension and conflict built up between you and your partner during the normal course of living. It also strengthens your image of yourself, as an acceptable, lovable person.*

A husband responding to a magazine survey

*I notice that while sex doesn't solve any of life's other problems, it often acts to take the edge off them – sort of a tranquilliser.*

A wife responding to a magazine survey

*A little coitus never hoitus.*

Anonymous

For a man and a woman to live together under the same roof and have to share everything is a highly unnatural state, and some bickering and fighting is to be expected. Yet however natural it may be to squabble, there are two obvious objectives: the first is to keep arguments to a minimum, and the second is to end the altercation as soon as possible. And few things in achieving the latter are as powerful as lovemaking.

Couples should first of all use sex to mend arguments. Only sex brings in its wake a tidal wave of overwhelming positive emotion that makes a husband and wife feel intensely good about each other, washing away any hurt or friction that has been caused. In ending arguments, sex is the most powerful tool in our armoury.

Yet many people disagree, and this opinion has elicited a lot of angry response. Wives have pointed out that this is a typical male thing and that it doesn't resolve any of the problems. They feel used when their husbands refuse to talk a problem through and instead want to kiss and make up. And others have pointed out that one of the prohibitions in Jewish law is making love to one's spouse while the couple is fighting or angry at each other. It would seem, therefore, that both things make sex after or during a quarrel supremely *un*kosher.

Why then do I still affirm this advice?

## *Sexual healing*

Coming from a broken home, I sought advice from everyone I possibly could before I got married. What is the secret of success in marriage? I asked. I was surprised at how much people were willing to reveal about their own relationships and marriages and what they had learned along the way. Some of my friends were even kind enough to take out pictures and diagrams of intimate moments with their wives to help me get the picture (OK, this isn't completely true, but it comes pretty close).

I particularly remember speaking to the wife of a very close friend who gave me the following advice: 'When you get married you will no doubt argue,' she said – and I knew that her marriage had been particularly stormy – 'and there will be a tendency to kiss and make up and solve the problem through lovemaking. But don't do it. It doesn't solve anything. The cause for the argument is still there, in fact, stronger than ever, and all you are doing is covering it over for the time being with some tarmac. And even though at the time it feels great, it's just an escape. When it's over, the problem still exists and has to be resolved.'

However, ten years, thank all-merciful God, and six children later, I think her advice was wrong. It is the squabble that really paves over the latent love between man and woman. For why should problems be allowed to stand in the way of the deep feelings the couple have for each other? Isn't the truth of the matter that men and women are different, and will always be different, and that resolving all outstanding issues between them is clearly impossible?

What brings men and women together in the first instance is their attraction for each other, which pulls them closer despite their differences. And what keeps them together in the long term is the love that develops through sharing a life together after the initial attraction. Similarly, the one thing that brings the marriage back on track after a fight is the raw sexual attraction which brought the couple together in the first place, to remind them of their love for each other.

## *Satan is a hired gun*

There are two ways of looking at arguments between husbands and wives, in much the same way that there are two ways of looking at sin; and here I take a step back from being an author about sexual intimacy and don my ecclesiastical robes to explain myself.

One can view sin – doing something wrong – either as being something real that must be eradicated and dealt with seriously, or as something unreal, merely concealing and covering goodness, like a thick fog that obscures the light. Here lies one of the major points of departure between mainstream Christianity and Judaism. In the Christian scheme of things, God is opposed by a rebellious and fallen angel who has set up for himself an alternative kingdom. In the same way that God promises rewards for good deeds, the devil promises material plenty for those devoting themselves to his will in place of the divine. The two powers compete for human followers, and although ultimately God will prevail, the devil has free rein in the meantime.

Hence, if one has committed a sin, it is insufficient just to turn one's head from the lapse and continue on the path of righteousness. Since sin is real, one must first obliterate the sin. The individual must liberate himself from the devil's grip through confession and deep remorse; even chastising the body and self-flagellation have been suggested for this. God, according to Christianity, even sent His own son to bear the terrible consequences of human sin which could not be removed through human agency.

But this is not part of Jewish thought, which is holistic and can accept no powerful ruler save the Almighty Himself. Goodness is defined as proximity to God, and evil is defined as being distant from God. Actions that bring us closer to God are defined as good, while actions that remove the divine presence from us are evil.

Although Judaism also speaks of a 'Satan' which lurks in the heart of each individual, the Zohar explains that this Satan, or evil inclination, should more properly be seen as a hired agent of God. While attempting to lead humans away from the path of righteousness, he secretly hopes that the individual will not succumb to his seduction. Satan is a trusted agent of God whose purpose is to confound man with choices so that humans, exercising their freedom of choice, can improve their moral stamina by refusing to do the wrong thing.

Judaism, therefore, says that our focus in life should be not on the bad things we have committed, but on all the good things we failed to do while pursuing the bad things. While there is confession in Judaism, such as the penitential prayers on Yom Kippur, this serves merely to help us identify what we have been doing wrong, and truly regret our selfish actions, so that we can correct our course *for the future.* Jewish penitence serves only as a means by which the sinner is sensitised to his wrongdoing.

In order to destroy even the gravest sin one must look forward and simply do a 'mitzvah', a good deed. Every sin of commission is in reality a sin of *omission*. It's not that you've committed a wrong. Rather, you omitted to continue on the correct path. Remorse is too great an indulgence in sin and bestows upon the past far too great an importance. Sin is dealt with mainly by drowning it in a sea of light, in an ocean of goodness.

### How about marital transgressions?

What we must try to recognise in marriage is the power of even one good deed in our spouses to bring back our love for them. For many years I have observed how the clearest obstacle to Oxford students' becoming seriously involved in the observance of Judaism is that they say to themselves, 'I've missed the boat.' 'It's too late for me to begin now.' 'I'm already set in my ways.' But 25 years of not living a Jewish life pales into insignificance when one performs even one mitzvah and allows the light of the human soul to illuminate one's life. And the same is true of marriage.

Lapsed relationships that have died with neglect can be immediately resurrected with one loving act. Little romantic gestures like bringing home flowers, or kissing a spouse when they least expect it, can remove so much accumulated pain, and can be far more powerful than words.

It is for this reason that I oppose my friend's advice and believe that couples *should* use the power of physical love to end most (though certainly not all) forms of marital strife. To deal with marital altercations in other ways is, in my opinion, to lend too much credibility to an argument about who did what wrong. Most marital altercations revolve around petty insensitivities which mushroom into full-scale conflict; an unwillingness just to kiss and make up suggests that there is a real problem.

### 'You don't love me'

To be sure, an argument over a very serious allegation, such as infidelity or physical or even severe verbal abuse, certainly cannot be solved through the sharing of a bed on its own. It is for grave matters like these that the Talmud forbids husbands and wives to share intimacy when they are very angry with each other.

But most couples argue over the silliest things: why dinner wasn't ready on time, who should walk the dog, how much extra money a wife or husband has spent, why one didn't call the other when they said they would. The overwhelming majority of marital arguments develop into full-blown battle precisely because a particular action or attitude is treated by the other party as proof that their spouse does not really love or care for them.

A wife whose husband forgets to call her at an appointed time is not upset that he has not called. She can live without the phone call. Rather, in her mind this neglect is wider proof of the overall fact that he doesn't care about her. 'Perhaps it is true,' the wife says to herself, 'that my husband did not call me because he was too busy. But it's also just as likely that he didn't call because everything in his life is so much more important than me. Everything comes before me.' And she harbours this painful thought the whole day until he returns, and when he steps through the door, war breaks out.

A woman once told me that she and her husband had had a terrible fight over the fact that he forgot to buy bread at the bakery on the way home from work. 'I reminded him three times, and he still forgot.' Did she really think that bread was worth fighting over? 'Of course not. But it just shows how he doesn't listen to a thing I say. If he loved me, he wouldn't have forgotten.' But that is why I reiterate that the best way to undo her belief that he doesn't care – *that is, until the request arises again and he is afforded an opportunity to fulfil it* – is to hold her and tell her how much he cares.

### Fanning nascent love

Such problems, starting as petty trivialities, must be stopped before they develop into something far more serious. The fact that a husband didn't call, forgot to buy bread etc. displayed not a sin, but an omission to show her love. He should be allowed to hold his wife and assure her that the cause of his neglect was stupidity. He simply didn't think. And the solution, then, is to show how much you are dependent on your spouse and have awaited your reunion throughout the day, and make love.

We are confronted every day by sex gurus with their endless advice about how the essence of a good relationship is communication. 'Talking' and sharing ideas have become the idols of modern marriage. Most people today aspire to be music lovers, museum lovers or any other type of lover, rather than just plain lovers. One man even told me that he and his wife are supremely compatible because both love riding horses (I asked him whether sharing the common experience of sitting on the ass of a horse is really sufficiently profound to make people happy). But although good communication is essential to a marriage, it will never have the effect of making someone feel as intensely wanted as a physical embrace.

Communication is no substitute for the feelings of closeness that are brought to the fore when a man and a woman make love out of mutual desire and respect. When a couple decide to kiss and make up, and once again become one flesh, they are making a very important statement that, essentially, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with their relationship.

## 7

# Sex, when to refuse it

*It's always me who has the gripe, me who wants to make the point. There's never any resolution of our bickering.*

*I always initiate talking about the problem. I think of what I'm going to say umpteen times, and then finally spit it out because I can't stand the silence any more.*

Two women in the *Hite Report on Female Sexuality*, 1981

*Men say women can't be trusted too far. Women say men can't be trusted too near.*

Anonymous

*Do you know what virgins eat for breakfast? No, I didn't think you did.*

Anonymous

There are a number of important caveats to my advice about the use of sex in arguments which I would like to add in response to accusations, mostly from informed women, that sex is counterproductive in solving a dispute. To their very legitimate complaint that they cannot be tender to a man who has just been so harsh, I say that I of course concur. Many marital problems are far more serious than those addressed above.

If, for instance, a spouse has a very bad temper, yelling and screaming all the time, it can certainly destroy the

marriage. If a wife is spending far more money than the couple can afford and her husband agonises day and night about how they will pay their bills, this too can undermine their union. As I have said, the ancient Rabbis prohibit a couple to share intimacy if either party is aggrieved or angry at the other. In these circumstances a husband must first apologise for any verbally abusive behaviour, utterly renouncing his actions and beseeching his wife for pardon.

This does not mean that a husband can just wait to do better next time and that matters don't have to be discussed, or that a wife's anxiety over a given subject, and her need to discuss it frankly and express her views, are not legitimate. It is fundamental to a marriage that you both seek to accommodate each other's requests and allay each other's fears. But both spouses need to understand that in this context timing is essential.

### *Male reluctance to talk problems through*

Earlier I mentioned that there is a real difference between the sexes as to how each copes with arguments. According to virtually every marital survey, it is overwhelmingly the men who want to employ lovemaking as a means by which to end a dispute. Sex researcher Shere Hite cites the astonishing statistic that 88 per cent of women say the men in their lives seem to prefer to avoid 'talking things over', rendering a fight inevitable.

Many women will refuse to have sex with their husbands until they discuss the problem. They see having sex as a sign of their own weakness and capitulation. If the problem is a real one that will not go away, it needs to be dealt with, not just kissed through. And they get even more frustrated when they draw a blank. As a woman reported to Shere Hite, 'He sits immobile, looking "above it all" . . . while I try to get through to him. What really infuriates me is that he comes off looking like he is the one with "good manners", while I'm making a fool of myself, becoming emotionally out of control and hysterical.'

## *But sex is not an act of capitulation*

Here I suggest that, although the husbands and the wives are both correct, the husband's way should be followed first, and not for reasons of male seniority or patriarchy. If the problem is real and needs to be discussed, speaking about it while both parties harbour hate and animosity toward each other will, in all probability, just make things worse.

Words can often be like throwing petrol on a fire, not least because in most cases both parties claim to be right. Making love, while not solving the problem, at least removes much of the immediate resentment that the dispute has aroused. After this, however, the wife's way must be pursued. It is now time to talk things through. Now that you are reminded of how much you really mean to each other, it is time to address your differences seriously and seek a logical resolution.

A husband who feels his love for his wife will endeavour to accommodate her, and not upset her. It's only if he feels angry or irritated that he will not do so. Neither of you will go out of your way to accommodate a stranger. But you will go out of your way to accommodate your spouse. So, to achieve the desired outcome, you should undertake the kind of activity that reminds you that you are partners.

These words stem from a fundamental Jewish mystical belief that in truth, deep down, we are all essentially good people and all we need is to remove the *klipah*, the husks or shells, which conceal our innate goodness. And included in this belief is the idea that any couple who once professed love for each other can recapture that love if they only try harder, instead of getting bogged down in the quagmire of their problems. Sex has the awesome power to draw a

couple closer together again; in Jewish thought, this is its ultimate purpose.

## *Never move out of the bedroom*

For this reason spouses should never sleep apart. Two married friends of mine, Denise and Steven, had a massive argument because when Steven comes home he sits in front of the TV, completely absorbed, and Denise claims that he is totally inattentive to her. Although this has been a constant source of irritation to Denise it really came to a head when a close friend of hers called with an important message while she was out. Steven, who was watching TV, answered the phone, and promised to pass on the message to his wife. But he forgot.

Denise was furious when she discovered the next day that her husband hadn't even bothered to write the message down. When she saw that he refused to discuss the problem seriously, she decided that that night she would sleep in her daughter's room. Several times Steven tried to cajole her into returning to the matrimonial bed, but she refused. He tried to hug her, but she pulled away. Unfortunately, her stubbornness just provoked the same reaction in him, and for three days they didn't speak to each other.

I asked Denise, 'Do you believe your husband loves you?' 'Yes,' she said, 'but he's selfish. He is absorbed into himself and acts as if I don't exist.' I said, 'Of course you shouldn't be a doormat, and he must show you respect. But there is a fine line between standing up for yourself, and taking revenge. Why should he desire to accommodate a woman who is acting like a stranger to him, even if he deserves it? Just as you weren't going to share a bed with him because he acted like a stranger, you chose to become a stranger to him. He's definitely in the wrong, but do you want to be happily married, or do you want to be right, come what may?'

Kissing and making up not only reminds a couple amidst their current difficulties just how much they truly love each other; it also convinces us firmly that we are entirely capable of taking control of our lives and that petty squabbles are nothing but momentary irregularities in an otherwise healthy, loving relationship.

### *When couples should not have sex together*

Of course, making love before resolving problems is not appropriate in all cases.

There is no reason in the world why, for example, a wife who has discovered that her husband has been unfaithful should allow herself to be touched by him until he has performed proper penitence and received her full forgiveness, renouncing any and all contact with the other woman. Similarly, a wife who is physically hit by her husband would be crazy to submit to his affections before serious discussion, and before counselling has been undertaken for this most humiliating and deplorable of actions.

## 8

# Does size matter?

*I'm tired. Send one of them home.*

Mae West, on being told that ten men were waiting to meet her in her dressing room

*Love is the delusion that one woman differs from another.*

H. L. Mencken

The students of Oxford who hear how Chassidic Jews abstain from sexual relationships before marriage, even once they are engaged, find the whole concept ludicrous. As one student said to me, 'How did you know that you were compatible? Didn't you feel that you had to check out the merchandise, you know, like test-drive each other?'

My favourite reply to them is that those who are fortunate enough to have had only one, or few, sexual partners, or to have married one of the first people they dated, have no criteria by which to judge their partner other than their happiness. For them, whether or not they are emotionally and sexually satisfied in their marriage has to do only with their own, personal feelings, and not with an 'objective', universal standard.

The only thing they need to know for a good sex life is whether or not *they* feel satisfied and happy. The strongest synonym for love is 'subjectivity', but the sexual openness of today's world has allowed every husband and wife to evaluate each other objectively. Those who have retained some innocence and naivety in the intimate areas of their lives are the ones who enjoy uncomplicated and pleasurable moments of natural love because their relationship is not haunted by memories of previous lovers.

The expertise developed by people who have slept with many others inhibits the natural bonds of love that come automatically to those who have no criterion by which to compare. A man need not know whether his wife's curves are perfect, and a woman need not be able to gauge objectively whether her husband is great in the sack.

For couples who first sleep together only after marriage the experience of sex will always be pleasurable. They are not seeking to perform or attain a high rating. Their focus is not on 'How am I doing, I wonder what she thinks of me,' but rather on 'How can I make her enjoy this experience as much as possible, so that she feels how much I love her and want to be with her.' A couple who live in this mould gain everything, and have at least as thrilling a time as anyone else, without sacrificing or compromising themselves.

## *The sexual Olympics*

I know this is a far cry from the modern age where the first sexual experience of young people is no longer as a natural and loving act, but rather as a test of their own accomplishments and prowess. Men take women to bed with the purpose not of showing love, but of winning competitions. They cannot seek refuge in the arms of their lover or spouse, for fear that if they engage in an act of love without being fully up to par, the judges will point their thumbs down. Even after the exertion of every effort to please their partner, they still might feel dissatisfied because 'It was not as good as it was with Henry.' So, Jane and Alex spend the night together. In the morning Jane takes out her score card and gives Alex only a six for his efforts. 'A six,' he protests. 'How can that be? Why, I have been practising all week!'

What sanctuary can we find where we can just love and be loved while remaining completely natural, just being

ourselves? The whole beauty of sex, and what makes it mankind's most pleasurable undertaking, is that we put ourselves on autopilot, doing whatever comes naturally. Truly pleasurable sex is when it is entirely instinctive, rather than premeditated, where sex is a response to an urge, rather than a forced and planned action. In job interviews we seek to impress, and at cocktail parties we seek to make others laugh, and on the sportsfield we seek to demonstrate our physical prowess. But in sex we simply celebrate the art of being and existing, rather than doing or performing.

Couples who have been intimate with many bodies can no longer enjoy their love making without allowing for the thought that they will be judged and compared with the men and women who preceded them. One can only shudder at the thought of so many people feeling inadequate because of drooping biceps, pot bellies, or the size of their breasts or genitals.

## *Feeling underendowed*

Having been told by one of her friends that a male acquaintance was six foot and seven inches, Mae West is said to have replied, 'Let's forget about the six feet and talk about the seven inches.' Studies show how right she was to assume that that was what would preoccupy him. Rather than live by the dictum of 'What matters is not the length of the wand, but the magic in the stick,' it appears that no fewer than 80 per cent of men are dissatisfied with their size.

I was aghast to read in the *Hite Report on Male Sexuality* that, typically, 'men wished over and over again that their penis could be just a little larger'. Men appear to have the strangest hang-ups. One of the interviewees (with an appendage rising to the national average) said, 'I think it is a good size when by myself, but in the presence of other men I feel self-conscious . . . It is as if I am underdeveloped . . . Emotionally, I feel I am a boy in a world of men.' Another offered, '[Mine] is big enough, but I'd like it to be even bigger, so that a woman would gasp when she saw it.'

This preoccupation is a frightening reflection of the modern mindset. In 1994 CNN carried a story of a respected surgeon in the United States who now makes a fortune performing an operation which elongates the penis. He extracts fat from the body and guarantees that by surgically implanting the fat at the end of the penis, it will be approximately 30 per cent longer. But the odd thing about the operation is that, when interviewed, the same doctor said that the majority of the men who have the operation are already average size. Only in two circumstances did he have anyone undergo the operation whose size was below the national average.

## *Female angst*

Women suffer no less in this modern beauty contest. Isabel and Colin had never had an easy relationship, even before their marriage. Within six months Colin came to see me. He complained that Isabel was irrational. She always turned the lights off before sex, and would freeze up the moment he put them back on. I asked him if he had done anything to make her feel so self-conscious, and he denied that he had.

But when I spoke to his wife it turned out that every time they watched TV together, he would always comment on how beautiful the actresses on the screen were. Similarly, when they went out with married friends, Colin would often comment on how attractive the other women were. 'But he never speaks to me that way, so I feel ugly. He's always telling me that I have to lose weight. I can't compare to the women he's attracted to, so I don't want him to see my body.'

The only way in which two people can actually enjoy their intimate life together is by first discarding all inhibitions relating to performance. To lead a happy life, each of us needs a healthy dose of inner strength and self-confidence. We have to have faith in ourselves as individuals who have a unique gift to offer, and this self-confidence comes about primarily from the stability of a long-term relationship in which our lover makes us feel like the most special person in the world.

## *An affair as a quick fix*

The arbitrary approach to marriage in which people treat their spouse just as someone they met, and with whom hopefully it will work – but if not, there's plenty of other people out there – leads to people discarding their marriages when difficulties arise. Once these spring up, they don't seek to sort them out, but simply seek someone new – if not permanently, then at least occasionally by having an affair.

An accomplished female musician was telling me how she had never planned to have an affair. 'It just sort of happened.' She was happily married, but one of her fellow violinists with whom she toured 'just grew on me'. They consummated their mutual attraction one night in a New York hotel room, and their affair continued for a few months after that, until 'I got a hold of myself and knew that this wasn't for me since I love my husband'.

She went back to her husband, but their marriage has never been the same since. To be sure, their love for each other has remained strong, and they both say that they are happy. But it's their sex life that is as dead as a doornail. 'We share the same bedroom,' she told me. 'But we have haven't had sex together in more than two years, ever since a few months after my affair.' What went wrong?

She made it clear that the cessation of their sexual life together was at her instigation. 'I am sorry to say this, but my husband is just not as well-endowed as my lover was.

And it's not true what they say, you know, that size doesn't matter. Once you've had something really impressive, it's difficult to go back.'

'Now,' I asked her, 'if your husband felt the same way about you as your lover did, if he couldn't wait to get home from work every day just to see you and lay eyes on you, if he stole away during the day and told you to meet him at hotels and the like and showered you with excitement and passion, would you have looked for a lover in the first place?' 'I guess not,' she said.

What our age so often fails to understand is that our principal sexual organ is our mind, not our genitals. Sex is not about technique. It's about attentiveness and responsiveness. As Annette Lawson wrote, 'If the psyche is unwilling, no amount of technique can persuade it. And if the psyche is willing, no lack of technique can dissuade it.'

### *Disappointing sex*

I even believe that those who have many premarital sexual partners are actually worse lovers than virgins because they are accustomed to sexual gratification coming horizontally rather than vertically. Whenever they get bored of sex in an existing relationship, they simply exchange partners and move sideways, rather than digging deeper into the relationship to discover its untapped creativity.

And to what end? The benefit of a long education in sex is doubtful. In a debate on the legalisation of prostitution, Kathy, a 20-something call girl who chaired a coalition of prostitutes, cried, 'If you're a doctor you become an expert in medicine. I'm an expert in sex, and I'm damn good at it because of all my experience. I'm proud of what I do. On the contrary, how do you expect to be good at it if you don't do it? All these little Miss Mary virgins think they know what sex is, but they don't know nothing.'

I asked her, 'Have you ever found any men who are as good at it as you?' 'No', she answered. 'I must say all the guys I've been with are all boring drips. Classic disappointments.' And that was my point. Since she was such an expert, she had suppressed the capacity of being naive in sexual matters and being surprised and delighted at a man's sexual advances. Instead of determining whether some guy she loved just made her feel good, she instead focused on how well he performed, and she had the vast experience to make her an expert judge. She could never indulge in sex as a full participant, but only as an objective observer.

### *So what is the answer?*

It is ludicrous to say that one can only be an exciting lover if one has many sexual partners. Good sex is all about initiative, creativity, spontaneity, being adventurous, loving, selfless, and never being lazy or rushed. All the things that one could try and learn from many sexual partners, one can experiment with within the context of a committed and faithful relationship. Read books, articles, speak with friends. Get ideas. Luckily, there many fascinating, detailed, and informative books on sex that can teach the aspiring lover and spouse anything they wish to know, and more.

But, most of all, ask your spouse what most pleases them. Never accept the totally fallacious argument that you can get from many partners what you cannot get from one partner. Isn't it enough that we all must constantly prove ourselves and compete in the marketplace, in the classroom, and in life in general outside the home? Life is full of competition. What we need is a place where we can retire from the incessant pressure of everyday life, and into the arms of someone who loves us and wants to be with us just for what we are, rather than for how we can be used.

The beauty of being married, of being in love, of having a family (and especially parents, for that matter) is that our lovers and relatives just accept us for what we are. This feeling of what I call 'passive self-worth', or feeling valuable even when we are not productive, is a human necessity. We need to be loved in an unquantifiable, immutable manner. We need to know that no matter what we do and no matter where we go, there will always be those who love, cherish, and miss us. Without this, we are doomed to a life of anxious insecurity and agony. We should not be engaged in a constant state of *becoming*, but rather revel in the art of *being*.

## 9

# What about pornography?

*Obscenity is such a tiny kingdom that a single tour covers it completely.*

Heywood Broun

*At male strip shows, it is still the women that we watch, the audience of women and their eager faces. They are more obscene than if they were dancing naked themselves.*

Jean Baudrillard

Oxford is too small a city to have its own full-blown red light district, but it does have a couple of pornography shops, two of which, oddly enough, are across the street from the house where we lived for seven years. Both shops are very low-key, and stand just one block away from each other as though huddling together for comfort. One, the Private Shop, has no windows and is a strange shade of blue. The other, the Adult Book Shop, was directly across the street from our home, and advertises itself as selling 'marital aids'. And, while the store front is entirely of glass, the glass is dark and impenetrable to the interested gaze of the schoolchildren who pass by, and is covered with wrought-iron mesh. The reason for this I discovered on one of our first mornings in Oxford.

While eating breakfast, we were startled to hear a loud crash: I ran outside to see the entire glass front of the Adult Book Shop smashed to bits. I have since been told that this had happened many times before, and that this is why the other shop has no windows. The window-smashers are radical and not-so-radical feminists and members of parents' organisations, who feel that the shops are a cancer in the heart of Oxford. But since the shops are still there after quite a few years of concerted harassment, these groups have tried other tactics, too. Probably the most successful one was to videotape every person who walked in. It served as a deterrent, but only until both shops set up rear entrances.

### *In search of passion*

To be honest, the shops are fairly unassuming. Moreover, a student who went into one to buy me a not-very-amusing birthday present, which was found to be quite tasteless by most of the people who attended my surprise 26th-birthday party, told me that the shop is pathetically boring; nothing but shrink-wrapped plastic erotica and magazines, and certainly not very threatening. None the less, many women in Oxford, particularly the students, find the idea of a shop selling pornography, however pitiable its merchandise, offensive and demeaning.

Jusdaism, as one might expect, tends to oppose pornography. This is not because Judaism toes the prudish line of the religious 'right', opposing pornography purely because it is indecent and immoral. Nor does it take the 'leftist' position that argues that it denigrates human sexuality and primarily degrades women. Although all these things may be true about pornography, they are not the root of the problem.

The issue for Judaism is that pornography does not enhance the passion and romance between a couple, but rather replaces them by something alien. As the purpose of sex is to foster and sustain emotional intimacy between husband and wife, whatever a couple does is permitted if it leaves their passion for each other intact. And here lies the problem, for in most cases pornography will serve as an end in itself rather than as a tool for the excitement of passion.

One of the most precious and important laws within the Jewish guidelines on love making is that no spouse may think of another individual during sexual intercourse. If they do, then essentially they are violating the most treasured gift given by God to us, the gift of human intimacy. For what kind of intimacy is it when you use someone's body as a mere source of friction for self-gratification, when you are thinking of and really being excited by the thought of someone other than your spouse?

### *A use for sex shops*

One may, however, contend that the best way to rejuvenate a deadened sexual interest in marriage is to use pornographic aids. 'Agreed,' say those who argue this point, 'that pornography may not be the best thing for marriage, and really a couple should seek to be excited by each other. But what if that just doesn't happen? What if a wife really is bored by her husband's all-too-predictable sexual routine? And what if a husband just doesn't find his wife's flabby thighs alluring? Isn't it better that they should get excited through this, rather than sit and watch some boring television programme, and then turn off the lights and go to sleep?'

The answer is, yes. But there is a clear distinction between erotica and pornography. Any erotic device, however outlandish, that causes us to be more focused on our spouse, may be used. An obvious example is a wife buying the sexiest lingerie to excite and stimulate her husband. Similarly, sexual devices and toys may allow a couple to expand their sexual play. This may not everyone's cup of tea, but that doesn't make it unkosher. Sexual toys and games may indeed be the answer for couples whose sex life needs to be raised from the dead.

If the Oxford shop I have described could truly become what it purports to be, a marital-aid shop, its existence should be applauded. Any device that helps keep a husband interested in his wife, and a wife interested in her husband, is praiseworthy. It does not necessarily mean that every couple should patronise such places. Some couples may genuinely not feel the need to employ any external agents to enhance their sex life. But many do, and, therefore, every form of lingerie, mirror on the ceiling, or plastic object that helps us to break the pattern of monotony that can set in, is kosher.

We need to be realistic about the difficulty of maintaining passion in a monogamous relationship in which one has the same sexual partner day in and day out. And while intrinsic and internal causes for passion within marriage may indeed be superior to external and artificial aids, this does not in any way limit the extent to which, in many circumstances and relationships, couples might find them useful.

## *Pornographic magazines and videos*

None the less, I repeat, real pornography is very different. The same people may argue, 'What harm, after all, can there be in just watching other people's bodies? After all, we're not really doing anything with them.' But any form of explicit sexual material that leads to a husband or wife focusing on someone or something other than each other is harmful. It is sexual excitement as an end in itself, rather than as a means to achieving enhanced closeness and excitement between two committed sexual partners.

The perfect relationship is where a couple have both passion, novelty and excitement on the one hand, coupled with intimacy, friendship and predictability on the other. And while pornography may grant the former, it totally destroys the latter. It inhibits intimacy by causing a man to be more excited by some stranger than by his own wife.

When a husband watches some other woman on a celluloid screen and then makes love to his wife, he gives his

wife his body but gives the image on the TV his heart and his mind. This is more like sexual decapitation, where he uses his spouse merely for glorified autoeroticism. No wonder women find it insulting and degrading. Even if the thought of another woman might excite a husband during lovemaking with his wife, Judaism would not, could not allow this, and no self-respecting man or woman should tolerate it.

## *Adultery of the mind*

The use of pornographic magazines and videos is remarkably similar to adultery. In the case of actual adultery the chasm that is created is far more serious, since you have not only thought about sex with another partner or merely studied their body; you actually did something about it and shared an intimate act which should be reserved exclusively for marriage. Nevertheless, because you fantasise about sharing intimacy with a stranger, it has the same effect of depleting the very necessary reserves of love in your marriage. You are focusing your pent-up sexual energy elsewhere.

If there is no lust within a marriage, because it has been channelled in another direction for too long, there will soon be no marriage left to destroy. What really destroys a relationship is not the mistakes that a couple make that hurt each other. Rather, it is emotional and erotic neglect.

## *The boom in home-made pornographic pictures*

The truth is that we don't even really need pornography to get sexually stimulated when we feel bored with our spouse, and here is the proof. In the past few years, there has been an explosion of home-made pornographic material. The biggest sellers are not the professionally made videos of beautiful and shapely models yelling at the top of their lungs. Rather, it is the videos of ordinary housewives whose husbands film them doing none-too-professional stripteases and performing other acts.

In other words, what the guy down the street most wants to see is *your* wife taking off her clothes on film. So why are *you* bored of her? Of course, the answer is not that she is unattractive, but rather that you have seen her a thousand times already and now you want to see something new. And seeing your neighbour Harry's wife Matilda take off her bra is damned exciting!

But you, and not your neighbour, should have those dirty thoughts about your wife. And act upon them. Rather than go out and buy one of these videos and magazines which are an insult to your wife, go out together and get erotic things and acquire new ideas which you can explore together and which bring the quality of newness into the marriage. Far better that you take photographs or make videos of yourselves together, if you feel you truly need external aids to jump-start your passion, than that you both sit and watch strangers.

## *A brief word on modesty*

It is sometimes argued that modesty prohibits certain sexual practices. But pious people who are dressing modestly because they think that lusting after the body is ungodly have got it all wrong. The Bible wants husbands and wives who lust after each other. The real reason that God commands us to dress modestly is so that the natural power of the human body to attract remains intact.

Sex must always be a journey of discovery that is fuelled by curiosity. Otherwise, the scenario might be like this: a wife comes into the bedroom and undresses while her husband is watching television. And even as she removes every stitch of clothing, he continues to watch television!

When watching a BBC documentary on the western Amazon rainforest becomes more interesting than watching your wife undress, you know that your marriage has had it! The Ten Commandments prohibit a man from lusting after his neighbour's wife; there is no prohibition against lusting after your own wife.

That the purpose of modesty is to enhance rather than subdue the attraction of the human body, and to increase the eroticism of the sexual encounter between husband and wife, is expressly related by Rabbi Menachem Meiri, one of medieval Jewry's greatest Rabbis. He declares: 'Although a wife must be modest in public, her loss of all modesty in private is not a contradiction to this in any way, because the whole idea of her modesty in public is that she preserve her feminine charm for her husband.'

## *The point of sex*

I once presented my argument about pornography and sex aids in a closed seminar for Jewish married couples in London. Little did I know that there was a reporter in the audience. The next day, an Anglo-Jewish newspaper appeared with the headline 'Rabbi Advocates Opening of More Sex Shops Around Britain'. You can imagine that the next day I wasn't the most popular man in my religious Jewish community. So I wrote a letter to the newspaper correcting their report, and emphasising that I had supported the idea of marital-aid shops rather than sex shops.

A week later I received a letter from the owner of a string of sex shops, asking if I would give my official Rabbinical seal of approval to these shops if they changed their advertising and emphasised that their purpose was to aid married couples to get more excited about each other. He told me, 'I think that it would be great for business.' Well, I was prepared to go ahead with the outlandish idea, with three caveats. First, he had to rid the shops of all pornographic videos and publications. Second, he had to restrict access to married people. Third, he had to make me a 50 per cent partner in the business. He turned me down on all conditions.

The point is that the nature of human sexuality is something that pulls us outside of ourselves, as it is meant to do. It is not at all something private or solitary. It is not something we can ever fully enjoy on our own. We must always contemplate someone else. Sexuality serves as the primary means of bringing two lovers together, and by inverting the process and using it purely for self-pleasure and not to attach us to someone else, we destroy the mechanism of binding two people as one.

## 10

# Lights, on or off?

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons . . . and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.*

Genesis 3: 7–8

*My advice to those who think they have to take off their clothes to be a star is: once you're boned, what's left to create the illusion? Let 'em wonder. I never believed in givin' them too much of me.*

Mae West

A couple came to see me once. The husband was complaining about their sex life. 'My wife is too shy, it drives me crazy! I can't take it any more. She insists on undressing in our bedroom with the lights off. And we can only have sex with the lights off. I can't be married to a prude.' His wife refused to discuss the matter with her husband present. But when he left the room she piped up, 'Of course I'll only undress in the dark. But it's his fault. He doesn't think I'm beautiful, doesn't even look at me. I undress and his eyes are still glued to the TV. I'm ashamed of the way I look so I only undress with the lights off. If he would give me more confidence I would be so much happier.'

The obsession we all have today about looking like Adonis is often counterproductive. The husband spends three months living in a gym, but still his love-handles cling on to his body. The wife does everything to tighten her stomach, even using her children as weights to do sit-ups. But still her stomach and thighs seem to have a mind of their own. So they both become more inhibited during sex. The husband holds his breath the entire time, thinking that this way his pot belly looks muscular. But it doesn't work, and who needs this?

## *Staring and looking*

The ancient Rabbis strongly advocated that lovemaking take place in the dark. There are profound reasons why darkness increases the mystery of sex.

I don't often perform weddings, since I am more of an activist Rabbi who runs an outreach organisation, but I had none the less agreed to marry Jeffrey and Sally. Though they were not very observant, tradition was important to them and we all agreed to study the Jewish marriage laws together prior to the wedding. This actually put a spanner in the works. Jeffrey saw that the Code of Jewish Law says that a man should not stare at his wife's genitals, even during lovemaking, and that love should be made with the lights off. 'What kind of medieval nonsense is this? Once married, are we meant to behave like two inhibited strangers? I can't even look at my wife's body? This stuff's outdated rubbish,' he stormed.

'Notice,' I countered, 'it doesn't say that you can't look at your wife's body. Rather, it says that you shouldn't stare.' In other words, don't get too hung up on each other's body parts. Don't focus on genitals to the detriment of the total personality. Inhibition is brought into lovemaking specifically when the body conceals the personality, and the Biblical advice here is never to allow that to happen in marriage. Sex should be about the fusion of two personalities, rather than two bodies, and physical attraction is merely a means to emotional love.

## *Bodily attraction is the bait*

If we think about it, physical attraction is meant to work something like this. A man goes to a party. There is a woman nursing a drink in a corner of the room. She catches his eye and he crosses the dance floor to chat with her. What leads him across the room is not her personality. He hasn't even met her! Rather, it's her body and the chemical attraction that exists between the sexes.

But the purpose of her external attraction is to lead him to come to know her inner beauty, her personality. For, notwithstanding how beautiful the body is, we grow bored of discovering and rediscovering the body, because there is not that much to uncover. If he sees her and just wants to have sex with her, no relationship will develop. He goes over to her, delivers his lines, and asks, 'Your place or mine?' But if he wants to know her, they can later become one. He first sees her body, he walks over, and now he discovers her personality, her warm and loving nature. What began as bodily attraction has been transmuted into the orchestration of two souls.

## *Transcending the body*

It follows, then, that in lovemaking our ultimate objective is to transcend the body. We experience an intense pleasure that makes us feel really good about our partner, the object of our love. We have an out-of-body experience. We feel transported by the sexual encounter, lifted above the constraints of the body and meeting at the level of the soul. This is what orgasm is all about. It is an intensely unifying moment in which man and woman experience a spiritual epiphany. But this is only true when the interest of pleasure is sublimated to become a tool of unity.

In the dark, where the sounds, movements, and feel of our beloved ignite the imagination and kindle the sensations, we are seeing with the eye of the mind. Fantasy is more easily integrated into the experience. This is why we so often close our eyes during lovemaking. And if closing our eyes allows us to pepper our sex lives with fantasy and imagination, how much more does a darkened environment allow us to love fully and creatively?

Light during sex makes it so much more difficult to connect on that deeper level of personality, because the focus is still on the body. The casual sex we indulge in today is not lovemaking but simple carnal relief. And this is why when it is over, although we feel satiated, we remain strangers and the next morning we feel an emptiness again. But lovemaking where the objective is the fusion of two personalities leaves us hungering for more. We don't feel satisfied when it is over because we cannot get enough of our beloved, and we sleep sweetly in their arms. We have tasted how beautiful it is to feel truly united with someone we adore, and we want more, and more and more and more.

## *Is there an ideal time of day to make love?*

The ancient Rabbis were adamant that sex should take place well into the evening, at a time when husband and wife are relaxed and released from the cares of the world. And of course nowadays sex at night is also the most convenient: the children are asleep, Sainsbury's is shut, and the office is closed. Our minds are finally at rest. During the day we are focused on the millions of things we still have to do, our responsibilities tug at us and we have a complete agenda which still needs to be carried out. But at night we have little excuse but to focus intensely on our beloved.

If sex were only an act of the body, then it would be more appropriate for sex to take place during the day, when our bodies are least tired and our strength at its height. But our principal sexual organ is not the body. It is our mind. Only the mind can make something new. At nightfall we

feel that we have accomplished whatever could be done, and have now earned the right to relax and experience loving pleasure.

This need not mean that a husband and wife should abstain from sex during the day, or in the mornings when indeed their strength is at its peak. Indeed, the spontaneity of sex should never be compromised. However, we should be reserving our principal sexual moments for the evenings. Careless sex is just as casual inside marriage as it is outside marriage. Husbands and wives are not meant to have casual sex, where they make love to each other but are not utterly consumed by the experience.

The Talmud, too, advises that sex take place at night, but it also offers that one might have intercourse during the day, since otherwise the husband, overcome by sleep, might perform perfunctorily and end up despising his wife. Making love to a personality rather than a body must be coupled with maintaining passion in lovemaking. The purpose of religion is for man to learn to fuse together the godly and the physical – his soul and his body – so that he become a godly man. Similarly, the purpose of marriage is to fuse together the body of the husband and the body of the wife, allowing them to become one flesh. Only strong desire, leading to pleasure and to union, and love can achieve this.

## *Television in the bedroom*

Television constitutes the strongest outside intrusion into a couple's sex life that I can identify. Offering entertainment that is always compelling (British and American television notwithstanding), it provides a strong alternative to an animated bedroom life. Giving a couple programmes that they must see and concerns that they have to discuss, it does little to pull a couple together through intimacy.

Later we will explore how, in Jewish thought, a husband and wife are not allowed to wear any clothing during sex.

Sex is about flesh pressed against flesh with no physical barriers. But the same is true of psychological barriers. Psychological barriers are the strongest impediments to a total soul unity, and it is imperative that we rid our minds of all cares and concerns prior to sex. If we get into bed with half a mind, our spouses feel the distraction and are gravely insulted. Women especially want to feel that when they undress for sex, their husbands cannot help but get excited, drop everything they're thinking about, and make love.

Who can really focus on making love when the television is blaring? Any couple who are serious about sustaining passion in their marriage should minimise the amount of TV they watch at night. Better yet, there shouldn't be a TV in the bedroom, but only in the kitchen or sitting room.

## 11

# Is prostitution a safe option?

*Prostitutes believe in marriage. It provides them with most of their trade.*

'Suzie' quoted in *Knave* magazine

*Prostitution gives her an opportunity to meet people. It provides fresh air and wholesome exercise, and it keeps her out of trouble.*

Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*

*Marriage is not a word. It is a sentence.*

Anonymous

I always maintain that the people who should be asked their opinion on the question of prostitution are those who are most affected by it, namely wives. It's bad enough that so many husbands show gross ingratitude to their wives by cheating. Most women who are on the game have the time to develop their physical appearance and sexual performance to a degree that the average wife, encumbered with numerous family responsibilities, cannot match. As one prostitute told me during a debate, 'I may not be a rocket scientist, but I can launch any man straight into orbit.'

### *Don't ask your wife to go along with it*

Harry always complained about his marriage. Whatever spark had once existed between him and his wife had long since vanished. He murmured of lack of interest in sex. But he was a prominent member of his community who feared being shamed by divorce. Besides, he and his wife were close, if only as brother and sister. For the same reason he couldn't countenance an affair. What if he got caught? So he went to prostitutes instead. But he did so without any guilt because his wife Margaret actually condoned it.

I thought she had lost her mind. Her argument was that they had three children together, and got along quite nicely, even though their sex life had functionally terminated. The one thing she didn't want was to lose him, which she might do if he ran off with some other woman. With prostitutes there was little chance of that. Neither was there a real risk of disease, since Harry could easily afford to go to the really high-class ones who come with all the pedigrees. 'My husband's not made of wood,' she said, and held this to be the best solution to a bad situation. She was afraid of divorcing Harry, so she allowed him to indulge his weaknesses.

Margaret may think that she is making the best of a bad situation, but really she is *creating* a bad situation. Rather than there being any hope of her and her husband one day rekindling their lost interest in each other, she is ensuring that their marriage has no future at all because she allows herself to be replaced with cheap substitutes. Her husband may need her cooking and conversation, but he doesn't need her as a woman. His masculinity is delivered over unto strangers.

## *Marriage, much more than a word*

Since every marriage, even the dispassionate ones, has a nascent sexual fire, the objective of husband and wife is to fan it into a flame. A wife must not agree that the husband be allowed sexual outlets other than her, for in this way they will douse the flame together. He will no longer yearn for her as he would if she represented his sole sexual outlet. If he cannot live with that, better that she throw the bum

out than lose her dignity.

Once a marriage has irretrievably broken down it is better to end it in deed than continue it in humiliation. It is far better to go your own way than destroy your self-confidence by inviting in competitors. The argument that men will go to prostitutes anyway carries no weight. What if Harry couldn't help beating the children? Would Margaret overlook that as well? People cheat on their taxes. Does that mean we should legalise it?

## *Legalising prostitution*

Every so often a provocative social commentator will agitate for the legalisation of prostitution and brothels. These often well-argued pieces demand a coherent response. We cannot merely condemn something as unethical without demonstrating to those who think it is beneficial how it is actually harmful.

The oft-repeated arguments in favour of opening a legal brothel right in the heart of your neighbourhood are basically these. Men are going to go to prostitutes regardless of any other consideration. Almost 70 per cent of the men questioned for the 1948 *Kinsey Report* claimed to have visited a prostitute at some time in their lives. If brothels were legalised, the risk of AIDS infection and the spread of sexual disease would be severely curbed, and the prostitutes themselves would be better protected rather than beaten by clients and pimps. Finally, if men feel that they need a sexual outlet with someone other than their wives, isn't it better that they go to a prostitute, where it won't lead to a full-blown affair, which might pull them away from their wives?

But all these are short-sighted arguments. The success of a society is based ultimately on the bonds between man and woman. If people who once professed love to each other and joined together in matrimony cannot live together in harmony, what hope is there for more far-reaching goals like world peace? Why on earth, then, would we want to make it easier for married men to cheat on, and thereby become less dependent on, their wives by guaranteeing them risk-free sex?

## 12

# Sadomasochism

> ***The aim of sadism is to transform a man into a thing, something animate into something inanimate, since by complete and absolute control the living loses one essential quality of life – freedom.***
>
> **Erich Fromm**

> ***Everyone probably thinks that I am a raving nymphomaniac, that I have an* insatiable *sexual appetite, when the truth is I'd rather read a book.***
>
> **Madonna**

Upon the publication of my book *The Jewish Guide to Adultery*, friends of mine quipped that in time I would be forced to write a sequel entitled *The Jewish Guide to Incest* or, better yet, *The Jewish Guide to S&M*. I thought this was rather a good suggestion at first, as I have always confused the initials S&M with M&S, the initials of Marks and Spencer, Britain's leading retail clothing chain. Since we Jews get an almost orgasmic thrill from shopping, such slips are not uncommon.

Little did I know that two years later a television company would ask me to debate sadomasochism live with actual members of the Spanner case. The 15 men who were prosecuted in this case, for meeting regularly to mutilate each other's genitals in the name of sexual delight, had appealed to the European High Court of Human Rights to overturn their convictions at the hands of the British court system which sent a number of them to prison. Lucky for us, they even videotaped their exploits for posterity, although never with the intention of public viewing.

But even their exploits are 'blasé and boring' by the standards of creativity adopted by some of the men I spoke to through the proposed television programme. A young man named Mike enjoys lighting firecrackers in his bottom, and John likes hanging weights, and an occasional saw and other pieces of hardware, from his penis. Mike defends his sexual tastes with the following enlightened opinion: 'Most people have narrow views of sexuality. They see guys nailing their genitals to wood as disgusting. What's it got to do with them?' And Dominique Matrix from Feminists Against Censorship says about these activities, 'I love it. It's safe!'

## *What about consent?*

The liberty for man to pursue any perversion he pleases is licensed by the argument of consent, or, to be more precise, *informed* consent. What two consenting adults do in the privacy of their own bedroom is beyond the letter of the law. As another television participant put it, 'It's up to individual adults what they do. What could possibly be wrong with it? It's a personal choice and nobody else's business.' Others cry out against 'the sex police' and 'the purity patrol' and argue that it is immoral for society to intrude upon their private tastes.

But for consent alone to be used to defend these actions is absurd. Judaism cannot countenance the mutilation of the body in any circumstance bar one: when such actions are undertaken expressly for medical purposes, or circumcision, or the prolonging of life. And Judaism is no stick-in-the-mud. Even cosmetic surgery is allowed on the grounds that for many it brings substantial mental health and psychological benefits. Mutilation of the body in the name of pleasure, however, can never be right. Judaism believes the body to be a holy temple,

even holier than the soul, according to its mystics.

## *Sexual deviancy and genuine perversion*

Yes, amidst the openness on sexual matters that I have argued for throughout this book, I believe that sadomasochism is different, and constitutes a real perversion. Now I hear you accusing me of intolerance. But hear me out.

As I have already made clear, I do not believe that the human body is constructed for intercourse. On the contrary, the human body is constructed for *reproduction*. What percentage of sex actually involves copulation? Is kissing natural? Is that really what the mouth was made for? To slither down someone else's oesophagus? Let's face it. Couples get up to some pretty weird stuff anyway.

I think the concept of sexual deviancy is a contradiction in terms. The essence of human sexuality is to do what comes naturally and automatically, and we all have an intuitive gravitation and orientation which we follow and which we find pleasurable. And if sex is instinctual, then even strange sex cannot be considered a deviance because every person's instinct is different and there is no norm. (I will ignore the religious question of homosexuality for the laws are beyond any doubt on this point.)

But sadomasochism is a real perversion because it is not intuitive and is not propelled by instinct. Rather, it is all about sexual experimentation, and is comparable to a heterosexual man having sex with another man not because he wants to but just because he wants to try something new and know what it is like. The average person is not driven genetically to hammer his scrotum to wood. It is an act that simply cannot be compared to a man or a woman's being driven to adultery.

Sadomasochism results directly from our contemporary jaded, fatigued approach to sex. Only when people have become totally bored of sex in its natural and instinctive form would they resort to such acts of desperation as hanging pieces of hardware from their genitals to jump-start sexual interest. The been-there-done-that mentality means that those who have no holiness or modesty in their sexual relationships will try anything to end the monotony.

Sadomasochism may be thrilling while it lasts, but it leaves the individual feeling empty when it is over. Its participants cannot get to know each other more deeply, but rather must resort to stranger and weirder sexual play in order to retain their interest. And once that's done, they feel they must expand their horizons still further, until they go totally off the deep end – like sticking gerbils in places that are worse than any cage.

### *Desensitisation to violence*

When people indulge in activities that are severely injurious to the human body, and call it a pleasure, they forfeit an ability to distinguish between that which is wholesome and good, and that which is agonising and hurtful. Violence, even of the self-inflicted variety, should never be dignified no matter what label it carries.

As a Rabbi who hails from a religious tradition that has always glorified the sexual act between married adults, I am not a sexual prude. It is in the spirit of a profound respect for the loving bonds that sex can foster between two adults that these lines are written. But what two people do in the privacy of their bedroom *is* society's business if it leads to violence or turpitude, either directly or indirectly. Even what a child watches on TV in the privacy of his own bedroom has an impact on society. This was the excellent point made by Frances Lawrence in her much-applauded manifesto after her headmaster husband was stabbed to death by one of the pupils in his school. Society as a whole must cultivate sex as an intimate and

loving experience, rather than as a means by which people use one another for experimentation, or even just plain pleasure.

## 13

# Orthodox sex, a hole in a sheet?

*He no play-a da game. He no make-a da rules.*
Earl Butz, on the Pope's strictures against contraception

*Question: What do you call people who use the rhythm method?*
*Answer: Parents.*
Anonymous

When Jean-Marc and Lisa were opening their presents at their engagement party, everyone burst into laughter as they uncovered the present brought by his brother: a large white sheet, with a very small hole in the middle and a fluorescent light in the shape of an arrow pointing to the hole with the words 'Insert here'. Jean-Marc was a law student at Oxford who came from a secular Jewish home, but he had become observant at Oxford. This had caused much consternation in his immediate family, who feared that he would change and become a fundamentalist fanatic. His engagement to Lisa, a highly likeable and not-too-observant American Jewish girl, had abated their fears somewhat.

Jean-Marc did not see the humorous side to this joke. The tension in the family was already high because of his return to orthodox religion, and he yelled at his brother that he had ruined his engagement party. 'Hey,' said his brother. 'I'm not the one who chose a religion that uses such sheets.' Losing all trace of humour, Jean-Marc exploded and yelled that this sheet nonsense had no validity to it and was just

another way to discredit religious Jews, and he looked to me for backup.

'Actually,' I said, 'allowing a couple to have sex through a sheet with a hole in the middle is a very lenient Talmudic position. Some Rabbis actually insist on the husband and wife donning full body armour before sex, while others take it a step further and mandate that the husband and wife be in separate rooms while having sex through a hole in the wall. Still other Rabbis further to the right insist that they be in two different cities and have sex by fax.'

### *Flesh pressing against flesh*

The real truth of the matter is that not only does Jewish law not mandate that a sheet be used; it wouldn't even allow it if the couple desired it out of a misguided sense of piety. The ancient Rabbis do not allow any articles of clothing to be worn during lovemaking. Sex must bring in its wake a tidal wave of emotion that leaves a couple feeling closer, and this happens specifically through the powerful feelings awakened when the body is caused to tingle by contact with another body.

A couple can don anything they want during foreplay to arouse each other, be it lingerie, a French maid's outfit, or American football pads and helmet, if that's what tickles their fancy. But when full intercourse is achieved, it must be done without a stitch of clothing so that there is no barrier to their intimacy.

### *Contraception and condoms*

This thought is borne out in Judaism's opposition to the use of condoms during sex. Judaism rejects Catholicism's extreme position that contraception is always morally wrong. Judaism, of course, insists that children are always a blessing, and therefore discourages a couple from using devices that impede pregnancy (at least until they have a boy and a girl). But if pregnancy will cause any kind of physical or mental health problems – such as where a marriage will be severely strained psychologically, emotionally or financially – the use of contraception is permitted.

None the less, in these cases Judaism opposes the use of condoms and suggests the use of the Pill or a diaphragm. Condoms are the ultimate barrier to intimacy. First, they are a real spanner in the works of passion. A husband and wife are deep into foreplay, are panting and yearning for each other, when suddenly – STOP – there is a pause in the action. He withdraws from the bed to put on a condom. Is there anything less romantic than that?

Secondly, he is not in direct, intimate contact with his wife's body, since a prophylactic now separates him from his wife. Of course, the main reason today for using condoms is that for singles having sex there is a risk of disease, but more of premarital sex and its hazards later.

## PART THREE

# Sex for Single People

## 1

# Do single people have more fun?

*No chupa, no shtupa – no wedding, no bedding.*
Yiddish proverb

*A triumph of hope over experience.*
Samuel Johnson, on the marriage of a widowed friend

Today, young men and women meet for all kinds of reasons: fun, a cure for loneliness and boredom, sex, companionship, participation in the social circuit, and peer pressure. But one reason they almost invariably don't date for, until much later in life, is marriage. Statistics show that the average man or woman goes through six *serious* relationships before they end up marrying.

What this means is that they also break up at least six times before they finally commit. They will have endured harsh, and sometimes unbearable, pain at least six times before they settle down.

No one pays much attention to this, but the effects of this repeated loss of someone who is important to us are by no means minor. When Bonnie met Alex she was over the moon. She had previously seen Daniel for five years, and had lived with him for four of those years. But Daniel, a doctor, had begun another relationship with a nurse in the hospital and had abandoned Bonnie just when she thought he was going to propose. Bonnie told me that this time she wouldn't make the same mistake, and that she wouldn't trust Alex as much as she had her first lover.

'Daniel promised everything and delivered nothing. We were going to marry, buy an apartment together. In the end the only thing I have to show for our years together is that I don't really like myself. No man will ever do that to me again.' Alex broke up with her seven months later, claiming that she was impossible to please. Bonnie had been so hurt by a previous relationship that she could no longer enter into a new one with the trust necessary to cement it into something permanent.

### Sexual loss

A few years ago I saw the movie *Total Recall* with a filmmaker friend of mine. While I marvelled at Arnold Schwarzenegger's proficiency with a ray-gun, my friend claimed he was more impressed by the central premise of the plot. 'It's about memory being the essence of human personality,' he said. 'Everything we have experienced and learned, which is nothing but memory, is what ultimately makes us what we are. You could alter a person radically just by changing his memory.'

'I've often thought,' he continued, 'that when I meet the woman of my dreams we should both have partial lobotomies.'

I kept a straight face, but asked him why.

'Because,' he said, 'then we could wipe out the memory of all our old lovers, and love each other exclusively. Our potential for complete intimacy would not be sullied by the past.'

Yet this is exactly what happens today. By the time people get married, there is this latent, lurking entanglement of premarital sex. It would be simply unnatural not to feel exceedingly close to someone after you have had sex with them. But in premarital sex, that is not meant to be. People consciously stifle the natural, powerful emotions that should flow in the wake of sex. Commitment is the big 'C' word which is counteracted by that other 'c' word: contraception.

### Dealing with emotional loss

One of Judaism's key concerns is with bereavement, because it leaves an indelible mark on us. When Virginia Kelly died, her son, President Bill Clinton, had to leave immediately after the funeral for a summit with President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow. He never gave himself a chance to digest the traumatic loss of his mother, and for months afterwards the press commented on how drawn and down he looked. No one can shut off their heart and expect it to give them no trouble, like a water tap.

Jewish law, therefore, stipulates that after a bereavement, God forbid, an individual must sit 'shiva', or seven days of mourning in which they don't fully participate in society but instead allow themselves to heal. The full gamut of human emotions must be allowed to play themselves out if the individual is to recover.

It is simply not natural to sustain the loss of a close relative and to be back at work two days later, smiling at colleagues and chatting with customers. Suppressing one's feelings of grief can, in the long run, have grave repercussions.

Similarly, it simply cannot be healthy for adults to suppress the natural emotions that are born of sexual congress. This provides no proper outlet for our emotions. It actually messes up our minds and our hearts when we try to emerge from a sexual encounter with no strings attached. The repeated disappointments and pain of breaking up on many occasions snuffs out an essential part of us and we emerge hardened by our previous sexual experiences, when these should leave a soft and vulnerable memory.

### Why it does not work

The problem is that we have simply experienced too much pain to trust anyone all that much. And this shows in marriage. Sure, we have the certificate and she is now known as Mrs So-and-so. But that doesn't change the fact that many people marrying today are likely to hold back the deepest part of themselves to ensure that they never get hurt again.

It is a real problem that we are no longer getting as connected as people in the past, and are actively compromising our capacity to do so. And this seems to me the strongest reason that divorce is so common today. Too many couples are not very strongly unified from the start.

Single people should think seriously about these issues before they engage in every form of casual, commitment-free, and loveless sex. Marriage means taking the plunge. You see someone and after getting to know the essentials of the person in question – that they are nice, considerate, attractive, loving, have the right values, and are devoted to you – you leap into marriage. There is no guarantee that you will be happy or that the relationship will last. There never is.

But once you set your heart on the person in question, you jump into marriage – and you allow yourself to fall. You place hope before your survival instinct. That is the essence of what makes us human. Marriage is a statement of the human love for companionship superseding our love for perfection. It really is quite irrational to put so much faith into someone who was once, and may yet again be, a stranger. But that's the beauty of marriage. It is a quintessential statement of faith between two human beings. People who marry, and remain successfully married, are great optimists who somehow believe that love conquers all. They go into marriage expecting that there will be far more joyous occasions than painful ones. They really believe in the future and in the person with whom they will share it.

## 2

# Is marriage a mere symbol?

*Here lies my wife, here let her lie. Now she's at peace, and so am I.*

John Dryden, the epitaph for his wife

*When a girl marries she exchanges the attention of many men for the inattention of one.*

Helen Rowland

At the beginning of this book I discussed the modern phenomenon of emotionless, biological sex. Young couples will spend the night together and then awaken in the morning and feel barely that the other is in any way unique. They remain strangers. A man and a woman will date for four or five years, and still feel that they don't know each other.

### *Why marry?*

A serious corollary of this lack of familiarity is the all-too-common refusal of some women, but especially men, to commit to marriage, even when they have been in a relationship for many years. Alan and Charlotte had been dating at Oxford for more than two years. Both were highly intelligent, highly motivated graduate students. Charlotte was two years older than Alan, and they started dating when she was 30 years old. After two years had elapsed, she began applying subtle pressure on Alan to commit. But while she felt her biological clock was ticking, he felt he was still much too young to marry.

They were living together, and Charlotte approached me for advice. 'Give him an ultimatum,' I said.

'But I'm afraid. What if he decides to leave me? I'm sure that I will never love someone this much again.'

'If he doesn't want to marry you,' I replied, 'then even right now he isn't really yours. You have to show him that you're not desperate.'

'But I *am* desperate. Of course I know that I shouldn't show him that. But I can't help it. I don't know what I'd do without him.'

'Well, at the very least,' I said, 'you should stop living together. Show him that you're serious. If you live together and he gets everything he wants without commitment, why should he agree to sign any contract? What possible benefit could there be?'

Charlotte ignored my advice and six months later the relationship fizzled out.

### *Putting a value on marriage*

If I had one pound for each woman who has complained to me that she cannot get her boyfriend to ask the big question, or at least to commit to seriously exploring the possibility of marriage, I could have been Bill Gates by now (and who would then need to write books on sex?).

There are many reasons for the dread of marriage, not least of which are the awesome financial and social consequences of the decision. But in an age when most couples live and sleep together before marriage, the problem is that there is no longer any clear reason why people *should* marry. What advantage is there to be had? He has a warm body next to him at night, someone to look after the home. And she in turn has a man in her life who loves her and makes her laugh. What need is there for a formal ceremony?

Now that men can get sex readily and without strings attached, they often see no good reason to marry and commit. As one attractive 29-year-old woman who had just

broken up with a long-standing boyfriend said to me, 'If we women all agreed together not to give any man sex outside marriage, they'd all be lining up at the altar!'

A close friend flew in from Miami to discuss with me how unhappy she was. She had already been living with her boyfriend for four years, even though he had promised that they would marry after two. Moreover, in spite of having a very good job with a high income, he would sit there with a calculator at the end of each month and tell her how much she owed him, charging her 50 per cent of every expense, and conveniently disregarding the fact that she cleaned the entire apartment and made him dinner every night. On top of it all, she was a highly attractive woman with an excellent career of her own. And he still wouldn't marry her.

'Are you crazy?' I asked her. 'Why are you selling yourself so cheap?'

She really had no answer to the question. Like Charlotte, she had agreed to move in and now all of a sudden felt hemmed in. She felt that having invested so much in this relationship, she didn't want to risk destroying it. And so she allowed it to destroy her instead.

Too many women today have simply forgotten what true love is and what a real compliment is. A guy will tell a girl that he loves her and that he wants to share his life with her, that she is beautiful and that he cannot live without her. She is very impressed and flattered. So she saddles up her stuff and brings it around to his place. But there is only one real compliment that a man can give a woman: 'Will you be my wife?'

It is the ultimate compliment, because it comes with a price that he is prepared to pay. All other compliments are just words. When he asks you to marry him he is not just thinking about sex, but about a future of you and him together. He is choosing to give up choice, and to forswear the possibility of romance with another woman for all time to come.

### *Is marriage really 'only' a symbol?*

We understand the necessity of symbols and their importance. And yet, suddenly, when it comes to marriage, people say it is 'only' a symbol. I once gave a lecture on the subject of why people should convert relationships into marriage. A couple who had been living together for 27 years, but who had never got married, came along. Now, no one could say that they were not committed to each other. In the man's will, everything he had was being left to his 'partner'. But he refused to get married, because he had had a bad marriage in the past and he felt that marriage was unworkable.

'Marriage,' he told me, 'is nothing more than a piece of paper, a sign to the community, and our love for each other is far greater than any symbol. Reducing our commitment to each other to a badge would just degrade the special quality of our relationship. Symbols just aren't important.'

I disagreed. Even if it were true that marriage is only a symbol, symbols are highly important. Every company needs a logo, every country has a flag, and every religion needs icons of what its faith represents. For a Jew, for example, wearing a 'yarmulke' (head covering: *yoreh malkah* – I fear the King) is a statement of pride in one's identity. We might even say that symbols are what life is all about. A graduate student would not be pleased if after four years of work his D.Phil was refused 'because it is unimportant'.

### *Marriage means clarity*

Although a symbol might be construed merely as a flimsy representation, our willingness to embrace or reject that symbol is the weathervane for what we feel toward the reality it represents. When a man wears a wedding ring it is a statement to the outside world that not only is he in love with someone, but he is proud of his commitment. So proud is he that he firmly and daily announces to the world that he belongs to someone. He has no hesitation in removing himself from intimate forms of affection with other women. And when a woman proudly displays her wedding ring, she is announcing to all who wish to hear that she believes her fiancé is special and considers herself lucky. Both see the positive side of commitment, and want others to see it too. Most importantly, the symbol of marriage conveys to everyone else exactly how much a couple mean to each other.

### *Conveying what cannot be expressed*

'Living together', on the other hand, means vastly different things to different people. You may, for instance, live together but still agree to date other people. One hundred different people will have a hundred different interpretations as to what your commitment to each other means.

But marriage means the same thing for all people. It connotes the exclusivity of sex, and the commitment to build a home and raise a family, and to put each other first always. Surely, when people are living together, one may ask one of the participants if the relationship is serious. But to ask that of two people who are married to each other would be ludicrous. When you're married, you don't need to tell people, 'We have it all, we're living together, we love each other, we go out together, and we share the same bed, the same money.'

In a Jewish marriage this is powerfully expressed. As the bride and groom stand under the wedding canopy, the bride wears a veil, and no jewellery, and the groom has nothing in his pockets. This is to symbolise that irrespective of her beauty and irrespective of their financial status, they love each other and commit in marriage. Their commitment to each other is independent of external considerations. This representation of their love is something that the word 'relationship' could never convey without further explanation.

### *Finances*

However, the fact that marriage is a perfect expression of love does not mean that married people can take it for granted. They must try to live up to the symbol as well even before they decide to get married. And this can be tough. Jane knew that she was marrying into a very wealthy family. But she didn't know that she would be asked to sign a prenuptial agreement, and she certainly didn't expect to be asked to do so on the night before her wedding. But the written contract was presented to her as a *fait accompli* by the family's lawyer and as a condition for her fiancé's proceeding with the marriage on the following afternoon.

With no choice left to her, she signed it with tears in her eyes. But the feeling of humiliation never left her and she never really bonded with her new husband. They divorced seven months later. 'Money was never an issue for me,' she told me, 'so why did Robert make it an issue by having me sign that silly piece of paper? If he was concerned that I was marrying him only for his money, then he shouldn't have been marrying me at all. But you can't have it both ways. You can't pretend that money is not an issue, and then make it an all-or-nothing problem the night before the wedding.'

Let's face it. Money is incredibly important to people. I can't begin to enumerate how many couples I have seen who have witnessed the steady deterioration of their marriage because they did not share a joint bank account, or where they had prenuptial agreements, or they just kept their earnings to themselves. Often these people are hedging their bets. You are not sure if it will work out and so you minimise your areas of co-operation. However, when you hedge your bets you are not channelling all your efforts into making it a success.

In effect you are saying, 'Everything I have, my prosperity and my future, my clothes, food and house, is bought with my money, and I am not sharing it with you.' This unwillingness to become a unit is particularly a problem for couples who do not have children yet, as it leaves a small crevice which later might grow into a wide open space. Marriage is a statement of total commitment, and it is undermined when external factors are allowed to serve as a barrier to a couple's uniting fully. Therefore, even couples who are about to marry should resist the temptation not to trust their intended spouse totally. Even in the most insignificant way they must strive to be described as being one. (And the same is true of sharing the same surname. I know of many women who object to patriarchy within society and refuse to take their husband's last name. 'Fine,' I tell them. 'So let him take your last name, or have a hybrid last name. One way or another, even in name you should be united!)

## 3

# Career or marriage?

*Men should keep their eyes wide open before marriage, and half-shut afterwards.*

Madeleine de Scudery

*A man in love is incomplete until he has married. Then he is finished.*

Zsa Zsa Gabor

When I first came to Oxford, I was under the impression that I would be spending most of my time teaching Judaism. That seemed to go with the profession of being a Rabbi. In reality, however, the most common subject that comes up today in my conversations with students is their problems with relationships. But I am no longer amazed that relationships, which should be the greatest source of joy in a person's life, today usually become the greatest source of pain and agony. In my experience, the overriding factor in the fragility of today's relationships is an inability to reconcile the conflict between wanting to be loved and doing everything possible to avoid commitment.

### *Commitment no longer has a shared meaning*

A girl who used to baby-sit for us always used to complain about how her boyfriend was not sufficiently committed to her. She would lament that he refused to devote a sufficient amount of time to her, and would always put his academic work before her. Eventually, the problem, or her perception of it, became so acute that she decided to call it quits and

broke the relationship off. I was quite fond of her boyfriend and the break-up surprised me. I suggested to her that perhaps she had treated him unfairly, even hypocritically.

She made an expression of disbelief. 'How so?' she wanted to know.

'Well, let's say he had turned around to you last week, before you broke up, and said, "Let's get married." Would you have agreed?'

Without even hesitating she said, 'Of course not. I am much too young to get married.'

That was exactly what I expected to hear. 'Well,' I said, 'in that case you were as undevoted to him as he was to you. In the same way you complain that he wasn't prepared to commit himself sufficiently to you, and this bothered you enough to break it off, you are no different. You are also as yet unprepared to make a substantial commitment.'

This is the dilemma faced by many young people today. Everything inside them says: find someone to love you. But everything outside them barks: you have to be nuts to get married. It is commitment they feel and commitment they desire. But they can't do anything about it. This girl wanted to be loved, so much so that she could never get enough of her boyfriend, of whom she was very fond. On the other hand, it had been inculcated in her that she was not to get married before a certain age, or, at the very least, before she had finished her degree.

On the rare occasion at Oxford that two students announce their intention to marry, their friends express not joy and support, but confusion and, sometimes, undisguised hostility. 'Is she pregnant?' 'No, she isn't.' 'But they're probably very religious?' One close friend of mine, a law student, who became engaged to be married at the age of 23, came to me virtually in tears after he had told his best friend and the friend had told him he was 'crazy'.

## *Personal success, a lost continent*

Never in history was there a more goal-oriented society than our own. Our parents push us to make our lives a success and everyone today wants to be something important. And, of course, there's nothing wrong with that. Any responsible parent would teach their children nothing less.

But a common modern-day scenario is that an ambitious young woman will go to a good university and fall in love with a romantic young man who is equally purposeful. When she comes home to tell her mother that she wants to get married, instead of a look of joy, her mother gives her a look of concern. 'Don't do what I did. I made the mistake of getting married early and I never did what I really wanted to in life.' She might encourage her to marry someone in the not-too-distant future, but she will also instil in her a sense of priority. There is no reason to put off promising career prospects. Marriage can wait.

From an early age we are taught to make something of ourselves, at the expense of anything else, even those things that are most natural and necessary. We are taught to believe that if we marry young and have children, we will never realise our professional aspirations. Success means money, a degree from a good university and landing a good job. We glorify football players and Hollywood movie stars as role-models when we read of their high salaries, and we envy their 'success'. The fact that so many of them are divorced, or on their third marriage, or live their lives in complete disarray, does not affect our perception of them as successful.

Yet it seems incredible that success is measured in this way. A man who works his whole life as a car mechanic, eking out a living on £200 a week, but who is a loving husband and a great father, gets no respect at all in society because he wasn't ambitious enough. But, if someone rises to be Chairman of IBM, is thrice divorced and has children who refuse to speak to him, is he to be considered a success?

Are we really so convinced of our personal mediocrity that only our professional pursuits count?

## *What comes natural?*

Have we forgotten that when we inculcate in our child the idea that at all costs he or she must be a success, the child may not understand that this should also mean success in his or her personal affairs? Aren't we sowing the seeds of the problems that our children will experience in the future?

If a young man or woman does not learn to prioritise family life over professional life prior to marriage, they will not do so even after marriage. In his book *Why Men Are the Way They Are*, psychologist Warren Farrell points out that what makes a man a success in the marketplace often makes him a disaster at home: 'Men try to make themselves attractive to women by the very process that ultimately alienates them from women.' A man works hard to make a lot of money in order to become more desirable to women. But then he marries. Working hard is now what he does for a living, and he neglects his family and his wife. The more he neglects his wife, the more bitter she becomes. He now seeks release from the pressure of his life in the company of women in his office where, psychologist Carol Botwin cites in *Tempted Women*, 74 per cent of all extramarital dalliances begin.

If you didn't get your priorities straight as a student, then you will always put your career first. But if you believe that marriage precedes money-making, then if your wife becomes resentful about the amount of time you are spending at work, you will at the very least seek to address her objections seriously and take the necessary steps.

We need to ask ourselves a question: does being a good parent, a good spouse, a good friend and a good human being figure in our definition of success as much as professional or financial success? A year ago, the stock market fluctuations sank many of my friends into a deep depression as they watched their net worth sink by five and ten per cent in a single day. I asked them whether they felt as depressed the day they fell out with one of their ten closest friends, thereby depleting their intimate friendships by ten per cent as well. We must learn to redefine our success first and foremost in terms of our personal lives. Only then do we truly stand a chance of finding fulfilment and happiness.

## 4

# Holding out for the best

*No man should marry until he has studied anatomy and dissected at least one woman.*

Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, 1829

*Wouldn't it be wise to wait until you are pregnant?*

Anonymous

An Israeli friend of mine had been highly promiscuous throughout his life and had never had a long-term relationship. Then for the first time he met a wonderful woman and they dated for two years, two years longer than he had been involved with anyone else. At this point I began receiving calls from him telling me how bored he was with her. 'She is a great girl,' he said, 'but she isn't adventurous enough.'

A month later he had broken off the relationship. He next saw her with another man on a date, standing outside a bar. He was so unnerved by this sight, and so overcome with jealousy, that he drove his car straight into a traffic light. (He later told me that he thought he had done this subconsciously to get her attention.) She came running over to him in tears, abandoning her date, to check that he was not hurt. This brought them back together for another half-year, but then it was back to the same complaint that he was bored. He left her again, this time claiming it was for good.

When he came to visit me in England a short time later, he made disparaging remarks about her intelligence and her dull personality. But whenever I suggested I agreed with him, he quickly shut me up. He refused to hear any criticism about her, defending her to the hilt on any point. 'In fact,' he said, 'she is a wonderful woman, though not as experienced as some of the other girls I have known.' (He once told me, 'All she does is lie there in bed. I have to take the initiative.')

I at first thought that my remarks upset him because he was feeling bad about the thought that he might have hurt her. But then it struck me that indeed he was in love with her. I piped up one day and told him, 'I bet that this is the woman that you are going to marry.' He responded, 'I hope not. If I do, I can look forward to a life of stultifying boredom. But you are probably right, I think I will end up marrying her.' And so it was, just a year later.

Men do have this terrible fear of dedicating themselves to one particular relationship, often principally because of their falsely inflated opinion of themselves. They have this uncanny knack of believing that every woman in every situation is interested in them. On top of this, many young (and some not so young) men feel that by taking themselves off the market they will be depriving hundreds of women who would otherwise be interested in them. It is therefore almost an act of cruelty for them to pledge allegiance to one woman. What will become of all the others who want them as well?

### *Crossing the Rubicon*

But if instead a man felt that he was lucky to have the affections of even one woman – that she still loved him in spite of all his faults – then he would feel privileged that anyone at all had agreed to marry him. It is humility that allows us to share a healthy relationship with another human being and arrogance that makes it impossible to commit. Marriage is the biggest decision of our lives, and we therefore often feel paralysed in making a choice. But the beginning of making the correct decision is understanding what prevents us from making the decision in the first place.

At 21 I too was terrified by the thought of commitment. I found myself dating a wonderful girl, and although I liked her very much, after the second week I did a lot of soul-searching. Chassidic Jews date to marry and therefore tend to marry early, but I decided that there was no way that I could possibly marry at such a young age. The fear of limiting my horizons and possibilities grabbed hold of me and made me shudder. But I didn't know how to break this to her.

The next day I picked her up and took her for a car ride around Miami Beach. We had a wonderful time. Nevertheless, the end of this great day turned sad when I finally broke the news to her that after careful consideration I had decided that I was too young to marry. My wife-to-be just stared at me in disbelief as if I had been misleading her all along. Why had I been wasting her time? I quickly added that it was no reflection on her, and that in two years' time I would be very happy to marry someone as lovely as her, but she just stared ahead, avoiding my gaze. I asked her if she would wait for me, and she told me that she was not sure.

This surprised me. I had (have?) a very inflated opinion of myself and expected her response to be that she would cross oceans and rivers for me, and was prepared to lay down her life to have me. As it happened, she finally looked at me and said, 'You seem pretty confused and therefore I don't think I would wait. What impressed me most about you was the maturity that I thought you possessed beyond your years. However, it now seems that I was mistaken.' She turned and walked away from me and I saw that her eyes were red. All at once I was confronted with a momentous decision.

I knew that my complaints were merely of my own making. I imagined two things. First, how would I feel if I

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heard that she had become engaged to someone else? I decided that I would be deeply hurt. In fact, I thought that I would never get over it. Second, I was definitely feeling lower than an anthill at that moment. I felt that I had been deceitful and that my lack of straightforwardness was hurting someone badly. But this was absurd. Should I marry someone merely because I felt sorry for her and did not want to hurt her? Or was it absurd? Did this mean I loved her? I decided that it did. I just couldn't bear to watch her in pain. She had already begun to mean something very important to me.

## *Cold feet*

But even after our engagement I was plagued by doubts as to whether I was making the right choice. A great many people spend what should be one of the most beautiful periods of their lives – their engagement – wondering if they are doing the right thing. Guests are beginning to respond, the caterer has his deposit, the hall is paid for, and the tailor is making final touches to the wedding dress. Suddenly, bingo! 'Is he really the right guy?' 'Is she the right girl?' You were sure that this was the person that you wanted to marry. So sure, in fact, that you put a huge amount of time and money into the marriage arrangements, not to mention showing off your fiancé(e) to all your family and friends and speaking about them in glowing terms. What is going wrong?

The explanation is that suddenly the magnitude of the decision hits us. This, after all, is the first face that we will be seeing upon awakening, the last face upon going to sleep, the person we will go on holiday with, the one whom we will laugh and cry and hurl with, who must be entertaining and stimulating enough to preserve us for the rest of our lives, our only sexual partner (at least in theory), and so on. It is, therefore, totally natural – and it can be easily

overcome. The important thing is to understand that when you suddenly find massive fault at the time you are meant to commit to someone whom you love, your complaints have no real substance but arise simply from the fear of taking the pledge.

Although Judaism is a non-proselytising religion, many non-Jewish students approach me every year at Oxford saying that they want to convert to Judaism. The conversion is a long and arduous process that usually lasts about two years and involves intensive study and a commitment to a Jewish observant lifestyle. About 60 per cent of those who begin the process usually end up dropping out. I usually know which ones will do so. When I'm approached by a conversion candidate, I always ask them why they want to convert. Those who give me strong, rational, well-considered reasons – 'I believe that the Jews are the chosen people, I like Jewish tradition and kosher food,' 'I want to reverse the discrimination that Jews have suffered throughout the ages,' 'I'm in love with a Jewish guy/girl' – are almost always the ones who end up dropping out. But those who cannot give a reason, who just say, 'I don't quite know why I want to be Jewish. I've just felt this way,' are the ones who almost always end up persevering through the entire process and becoming Jewish.

Engagement and marriage are similar to this. You've got to take the plunge, particularly if you're young. Because it is such a big decision, if you sit and scrutinise every last detail you will no doubt drive yourself mad. Focus instead on the big things, the principal considerations that should go into choosing a spouse. Marriage is only partly rational.

## *Marrying later in life*

The relationships guru John Gray recently disputed in his book *Mars and Venus on a Date* that the rising age for marriage is a cause for concern. 'Really, it is a sign of greater wisdom in young couples. They are waiting to get married. They are waiting to first get a sense of who they are . . .’ But where is this greater wisdom being demonstrated? In the rising rate of divorce? Prenuptial experimentation has not led to happier or more stable marriages. In the UK, the number of divorces increased sixfold between 1961 and 1990.

Why should we be concerned at the rising age for marriage? If people eventually marry anyway, what is the difference? My first answer is that it can cause much harm to wait. When we are young but wait, we may well encounter someone who would have made a perfect marriage partner but who is no longer available when we are finally ready to make up our mind. I always tell my students that it is far better to marry the right person at the wrong time than to marry the wrong person at the right time.

Secondly, when people marry younger they can grow together in a way that fully formed adults cannot. As we get older we also become far more set in our ways and we find it more difficult to compromise and build our lives around somebody else. It becomes far more difficult to learn from, and share a life with, a stranger who comes into our lives. Furthermore, the later we marry the fewer children we are likely to have, which certainly for ethnic minority populations like the Jews is of vital concern. The Jewish birth rate today is so low that studies predict that by the year 2035 the current world Jewish population of 14 million will be down to five or six million souls.

I have often been told that the last revenge of married people is to inflict the same agony on those who are blissfully single. Indeed, the world today is incredibly cynical about marriage. But I write these lines not in the hope that you who are single will forfeit your privileged status and remove the temptation from those of us who have taken the marital plunge, but rather in an attempt to identify what it is we really seek from our relationships. I am convinced that a

man or a woman who finds stability and passion early in life will not have to choose between career and relationship. On the contrary, having been fortified with the unconditional love of a permanent partner, they will be unassailable in the rat-race of the world, and succeed vastly in their professional ambitions.

## 5

# Choosing a spouse

*And he said, O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, I pray you send me good speed this day . . . And let it come to pass that the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Let down your pitcher, I pray you, that I may drink,' and she shall say, 'Drink, and to your camels also will I give drink,' be the one you have appointed for your servant Isaac.*

Genesis 24: 12–13, Eliezer praying that God send him a prospective bride for Isaac

*Courtship is the time during which the girl decides whether or not she can do any better.*

Anonymous

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In a remote area, according to primitive custom, a man would buy his bride from her father for a number of cows. Obviously, the worth of the woman was gauged by the number of cows she would fetch. There was a young woman who was considered plain at best, and her father despaired of getting more than two cows for her. One day a young man came and asked for her hand in marriage. The father was amazed when the man offered ten cows for her. He insisted on paying this exorbitant sum, even though the father was willing to take much less. The young couple were duly married.

Some time later the father visited his daughter and son-in-law. He was amazed to find how his daughter had changed. She looked radiant – beautiful, even. He remarked

on this difference and she explained as follows: 'Father, for years I was told I was plain. I believed it, and it became true. However, my husband told me otherwise. He saw me as someone beautiful, and was willing to demonstrate it. He told me that in his estimation, I was a ten-cow woman. And thanks to him, I became a ten-cow woman.'

### *Consumer values*

In the West, and especially in the United States, we have forgotten the truth of this simple message. We all search for the best. We want the best Sony Walkman, the latest BMW sports car, the most expensive Versace suit, and an expensive house with as many amenities as possible – swimming pool, sauna, tennis courts – in fact we want the best of everything, now.

There is nothing wrong with this in itself, in trying to decide, when we have abundant choice between objects, which is superior to the others, which is the best.

We run into problems, however, if we apply 'the best' to human beings. I was sitting with a friend who came from a poor family and, through his own efforts entirely, had become wealthy. He was 34 years old and still not married. I asked him why. 'Well, Shmuley,' he told me with a sigh, 'I have dated so many women. Beautiful women, smart women, but none of them has been right. I don't know. I'm not just going to marry anyone yet. I am going to marry someone very special. The best. I believe I deserve it.'

'Of course you deserve the best,' I said. 'Everyone does. But you have to stop treating dating a woman like a business acquisition. How can you connect with a woman if you see her as a trophy and ignore her depth as a human being? In relationships, there is no such thing as "the best". The woman to whom you are attracted, who is loving to you, and whom you respect, who shares your values, and who is willing to spend her life with you, is the best because she is everything you are looking for. But the moment you begin to compare her qualities with 50 other women, you'll just begin to drive yourself crazy.'

The way in which we look at marriage today is very much the way in which royal marriages of old were decided – not on the basis of love or attraction, but entirely on paper. The woman whose father was the most celebrated prince, who could bring the largest dowry, and with whose kingdom a strategic alliance was most beneficial, was chosen as the bride for the crown prince of the land. Today young men and women are doing exactly the same thing. Their choice of who to date and marry is based on their partner's education, job, financial resources, looks, and future ambitions. Whether or not this person best accords with what they are looking for most in a relationship, and is able to fill the hole at the centre of their being, rarely matters.

But it just doesn't work. Hollywood is filled with beautiful husbands and wives who are married, yet they cheat on each other constantly and divorce even more rapidly. Now, why? These are the most beautiful people in the world. Why would they feel the need to find someone else? A guy who is married to a world-famous actress who so many other men would kill for has surely married 'the best'. So why does he ditch her in favour of someone else? The fact is, even if you are married to the most beautiful woman in the world (and this is the reason you got married in the first place), she simply cannot possibly contain all the qualities of ten other attractive women.

## *Goodness is what counts in marriage*

When we apply consumer terminology to describe a human relationship we are making a mistake. If your criterion is 'the best', you will end up never finding it but rather skipping from bed to bed. Human beings are multi-faceted and human life is infinitely deep. We remove people's unique and infinite

spiritual character and reduce them to mere tissue when we sit down and compare them with one another like a kitchen appliance. The only thing that can bring real warmth and love into our lives is another human being whom we do not see as merely skin, flesh and bones. We must connect to our spouse in a deep and personal way. External, aesthetic attraction is the bait, but love is specific. When a man wants sex he can obtain it from virtually any woman. But once he falls in love, no other woman can serve as a substitute for her. Only his beloved will do.

What is central, therefore, with regard to the person we are considering for marriage, is the question of goodness. Tammy was a young woman in her twenties who had tragically been widowed. She was desperate and alone until she met Max, who quickly became the light of her life. He was successful in business and lavished her with gifts and impressed her with his caring attitude. She was so happy that after seven months of dating she was hopelessly in love, and she was flattered to receive his proposal for marriage.

But shortly after they married, she discovered that her husband was completely dishonest in business. Every day people would call his office and home to be paid for outstanding bills. He had not informed her that he had twice declared bankruptcy in suspicious circumstances. He would invariably lie to his wife and his creditors about his finances. And although this did not directly affect his wife and he always remained generous and gracious to her, their marriage fell apart because she lost respect for him. They began to keep separate bedrooms. I went to see Tammy and asked if there was any hope of a reconciliation. She was very blunt. 'I cannot live with a man who is so dishonest. I feel dirty every time I am with him, and I want to be clean.' I wondered whether she was right, for Max obviously loved her. But once respect is lost in marriage, loss of love is sure to follow.

## *What matters is a willingness to learn*

In another instance where I was asked to mediate, Gabi came to see me very late one night in tears. She and Simon had been dating for nearly four years. They loved each other very much and Simon desperately wanted to get married, but Gabi hesitated. That night they had gone out to dinner and had an argument, and Simon had lost his temper at Gabi and yelled at her. 'He frightens me. I love him and I'd like to spend the rest of my life with him. But I'm afraid of him.'

Simon acknowledged his bad temper and realised it was destroying his life. He went to therapy for it and tried his best to change. He wrote many letters to Gabi begging her forgiveness and pledging every effort toward becoming a better person. But none of this helped. Gabi broke off the relationship.

I went to see her and told her that she should give him a chance. 'If he continues with his outbursts, then break it off. But now he's really trying.' However, she would have none of it. 'When I was growing up,' she told me, 'I don't remember my parents having even one argument. The fact that Simon and I fight just shows that we're not right for each other.' I told her that her parents were very fortunate, but their experience was hardly the norm. Many times since, she has questioned whether or not she did the right thing, and whether she should have worked with him to overcome his anger.

This kind of stubbornness is a common fault. Simon was different from Max in that he openly acknowledged his shortcomings, and in that respect he was a good person who was committed to change. What we, like Gabi, fail to consider carefully is that when it comes to human beings and potential marital partners, there is no such thing as a person without any flaws. The only thing that matters is that we should know exactly what *our* special needs and concerns are, within reason, when we enter into a relationship. As long as the person we are dating satisfies those needs, then

they are perfect for us. Even if materially, aesthetically or intellectually they do not match up to the ideal that we have long entertained, this is still true. A warm and loving human being is much better than an abstraction in any circumstance.

## *Discovering our irreducible essence*

Every man and woman has a single inner point that best captures their essence. For me, the defining point of my life was my parents' divorce, and the concomitant desire to heal the world. The great challenge for me, and what drives everything I do, is the need to make things fit. I know that I am broken at the core of my being, and so I strive to make people get along, and to restore hope to people like myself whose life experiences have told them to give up. This is my personal therapy and what brings me healing.

Therefore, what I needed above all else in a spouse was someone who first could understand and forgive my considerable imperfection, and second could give me infinite support in my darker moments of self-doubt. In short, I needed a very feminine woman – someone incredibly nurturing, loving and forgiving, and who didn't mind playing second fiddle to a husband who often needs to be in the spotlight.

But obviously this is not the case for everyone. A close friend of mine was the exact opposite. He came from a very loving and prosperous family, which, to an extent, impeded his ambition. He was whole at his core, so he never really worked hard at school or in university. Not being unhappy or doubting his self-worth, he never felt the need to substantiate himself or gain the acclamation of others. When he married, therefore, he married someone not as nurturing, but rather more pushy and slightly more masculine – someone who would coerce him to maximise his potential.

I firmly believe that this is what we should look for, someone who fulfils us in the one central component of our lives where we are most lacking. While there may not be many people who embody a limitless capacity for goodness, love and selflessness, everyone in some way possesses internal goodness that must be brought to the fore, and marriage helps us translate our virtue and promise from potential to actual. Marriage is a supreme educational tool by which we can learn how to put someone else first. Finished products, people whose potential for goodness is already fully manifest, have little left to learn. If Simon were perfect, what valuable contribution could Gabi make to his life? Why would he need her? More than loving her, he really needed her, but she was blind to the possibility presented to her.

In the Book of Proverbs King Solomon says, 'As in water face answers face, so does the heart of man answer man' – whatever emotion you extend to someone will be returned. When you look upon your spouse and actually treat them as though they are the best, then they become the best. When you show them extraordinary love and cherish them as the world's greatest treasure, then they will dress, look, and feel like a million bucks, because that's how you make them feel. But if you approach your spouse with doubt, as if you're not sure that you made the right decision, then your doubts will become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and your husband or wife will begin to feel, look, and act like the inadequate person you have cast them as.

The choice to make the effort is ours.

## 6

# What if you drive each other crazy?

*We sleep in separate rooms, we have dinner apart, we take separate vacations – we're doing everything we can to keep our marriage together.*

Rodney Dangerfield

*The first lie detector was made out of the rib of a man. And they have been unable to improve on that model ever since.*

Anonymous

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Countless loving couples break up because of practical differences. I watch it happen all the time. When they fight they are broken-hearted because they hate being estranged from each other. But they can't stop arguing. Love, as they say, gives you wings, and allows you to surmount every hurdle that lies between you and your beloved. Isn't it astonishing that this same love is so often blighted by differences in practical living?

Jack was a student of philosophy at Oxford a number of years ago. He got a good job in London following his graduation. In his second year at work he met Barbara, and dated her seriously. After six months he was sure that this was the woman he wanted to marry and, having been extremely impressed at how much they loved each other, I encouraged him to take the big plunge. They got engaged and asked me to perform the wedding in one year's time.

But about a month later, severe problems developed and they fought like cat and dog. They thought of calling off the wedding. But because they loved each other they decided they would try living together to see if they could make things work. 'Better find out now than later' was their attitude. I advised against 'test-driving' the relationship. I explained to them my belief, that when a couple have married and are stuck in the same boat, they strive to make the marriage work. But that if you are just living together, the first time a major difficulty crops up, you throw in the towel. And the love you feel for each other won't be enough to overcome your difficulties.

They did not heed my advice, and began their experiment. It started out OK, but before long they reached an apparently insurmountable obstacle. Barbara came from a comfortable family, who had ensured that her every desire was always provided, and although she was not stuck-up or spoiled, she was not nearly as motivated as Jack. Moreover, hers was a loving background, two parents with a wonderful marriage who always put their children first. Jack, on the other hand, had lost his father at an early age and was riddled with insecurities. He felt he had to prove himself always. He believed in hard work, and felt that his fiancée was lazy. After a while, he began to see her as a parasite. Barbara was not working and he would call her at 11 o'clock in the morning and she would still be asleep.

Gradually, this led him to lose respect for her. Although he himself was charitable, he still could not live with someone who seemed to him to be a charity case herself. He decided to break the engagement off. Barbara returned to her parents in Manchester the very next morning, and he called me in anger. 'You're wrong, Shmuley, for trying to bring people together who are incompatible. I love Barbara, but I don't like her. So I can't live with her.' He went back to his busy and ambitious life. But within a few weeks he had sunk into a deep melancholy, and his work suffered terribly, especially

after he heard that Barbara had become engaged to another man. He couldn't stop thinking and speaking about her.

Nevertheless, he maintained, 'I still believe I made the right decision. It would never have worked out.' A year later I happened to publish an essay which argued that since men and women come from different, often contradictory worlds, it is impossible to comprehend every aspect of our spouse, and so at times it is important just to accommodate their will unquestioningly. Three days after the essay was sent out Jack called me, shaken. 'I'm calling because I am really in a bad way and I don't know what to do about it. Perhaps what you are saying in that article applied to me and my situation. Maybe I did her an injustice.'

## *Love conquers all*

Jack loved his fiancée dearly, and keeps a picture of her near his bed to this very day (he is not engaged again or married). Yet their love for each other was not enough to conquer her reluctance to perform the simplest chores and save their beautiful relationship, nor to make him understand that she was different from him. So what is meant when we speak about the power of love?

What it means, in situations where practical differences begin to undermine a relationship, is upholding the romantic ideal. Love can conquer all, or almost all. But the couple have to make sure that they do indeed love each other, and not just think they love each other. Conventional wisdom dictates that love is something you feel rather than something you do. But this is wrong. When the Bible says, 'Love your fellow man as yourself,' the Rabbis immediately interpret this to mean, 'Treat him the way you yourself want to be treated.' Love is not measured by the beating of a heart, but by the actions of the hands. The best way to gauge the authenticity of the affections of lovers is to see what they *do* about their love.

This point is well made in *Fiddler on the Roof*, the story of Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman, and three of his daughters. All three find love outside the Jewish tradition of that age, culminating in the ultimate form of sacrilege for the father when his youngest daughter marries a Gentile. The subtle message of this simple tale, however, is often overlooked. For it exemplifies Jewish love and the way that Judaism has always taught us to distinguish between real and false emotions. When Tevye watches the way each of his three daughters falls in love, he sees that they are all starry-eyed, singing, dancing, and immensely happy. In short, they look as though are in love. Infatuation has overtaken them. The young lovers sit on park benches, passionately kissing each other for hours. If that isn't love, what is?

Noticing the lack of such activity in his own marriage, Tevye is confused. His daughters' love-life is radically different from his own, and he wonders whether or not he is truly in love with his wife. He runs home and asks his wife, Golda, 'Do you love me?' She ignores him. So Tevye asks her again, 'Golda, do you love me?' Golda thinks the question absurd and refuses to answer. But he presses her until finally she exclaims, 'For 25 years I've washed your clothes, ironed your shirts, raised your children, cooked your dinners, tended to you when you were sick, and shared this pitiable existence with you without complaint. If that isn't love, what is?'

Besides being funny, Golda's point is profound. When we witness a young couple embracing in an airport, kissing passionately, we think that's love. Yet when another couple, who have been married for many years, meet in the airport and there is no overt display of emotion, we think of the staleness of their marriage. But although the wife may not fling herself upon her husband as he arrives home, she has been waiting there. She took care of their children while he was away, helped run the family business, helped him pack his bags before he left, and generally served as his partner in all things. A young couple who only *think* they love each other are making out on the living-room couch one moment, but are breaking up the next. Yet a couple in a strong marriage love each other enough to work out their differences.

Being in love with someone should express itself in the smallest actions. You not only write poetry to each other, but you also take out the garbage so your spouse doesn't have to do it. And perhaps taking out the garbage and saving them the burden is an even greater statement of love than the poetry; it tacitly says, 'I love you so much that I am even willing to do those things that I don't enjoy.' Because I love you, I don't see these unpleasant things as a terrible burden. When I see you happy, it makes it worthwhile.

## *What if the problem turns out to be insurmountable?*

Rebecca and Sam had been married for nine years and had three children. Sam loved his wife very much but could not live with her financial irresponsibility. She spent money constantly, and with no regard to whether or not her husband could keep up with the bills. The things she bought were extravagant and unnecessary. Every day creditors came to the house asking Sam for payment of outstanding invoices. He, knowing nothing of the debt she had accumulated, faced humiliation wherever he went within his local community. He took a second job, but this just caused her to spend even more money. For many years he gave the marriage a chance as he heard his wife's promises that she would change. Exasperated, when this did not seem to happen, he offered to pay for her to see a therapist about her problem, but she refused to go.

One day he threw in the towel. 'I simply can't live like this,' he told his wife. Amidst her protestations of how much she loved him and how they should make it work, he left the marital home and filed for divorce. I reluctantly supported his decision, and Rebecca was angry with me. 'It's not my fault, Shmuley, I have a problem, and I admit it. I spend much more than we can afford. But that doesn't mean I don't care about my family.' However, having a problem was no excuse, I told her. Sometimes, loving someone means caring enough to go and seek help for your problems.

The truly selfish person will always find difficulties in relationships. Part of the very definition of being in a relationship is leaving room for another person to enter your life. While there are, to be sure, people who may be prepared to enter as second-class citizens, they are few, and will sooner or later tire of their secondary existence. One must, of course, be absolutely sure that the practical consideration distancing you from your spouse is so central to your existence that you are willing to break your marriage over it, and we must do everything we can to keep our marriages together. But there is an end to putting the other first. An abusive or totally neglectful spouse who doesn't make an effort to change their behaviour must sometimes be shown the door.

An inability to accommodate your lover's bidding does not necessarily indicate that you do not love them. But it does indicate that you love yourself more. Worryingly enough, the 'me' generation of today's society suffers from a suffocating selfishness that threatens to asphyxiate our hearts and souls. Love is a natural outward effusion, through which we actually derive pleasure from the joy of our loved one. Marriage can just give us that helping hand, because we feel compelled to work out our difficulties. But we must love with a divine love that transcends our tendency to put ourselves first.

## 7

# Why should we marry at all?

*There is no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage.*

Thomas Webbe (1660s)

*Men marry because they are tired; women, because they are curious; both are disappointed.*

Oscar Wilde (Lord Henry, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

*I think people really marry far too much; it is such a lottery after all, and for a poor woman a very doubtful happiness.*

Queen Victoria in a letter to her daughter, 1858

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It seems obvious to me that few today fully understand the reasons why we marry. Most people say that their reason is love, but it can surely be argued that the need to formalise institutionally one's love for another human being indicates a deficiency or insecurity in that love. If you truly love each other, then the feelings you have right at this moment should be sufficient to maintain both of you together for the rest of your lives, without the formality of a public ceremony.

And if you don't love each other sufficiently, it is foolish to think that marriage will hold you together. No one wants to remain in a loveless marriage. If love is the reason we marry, then marriage is a statement that emotional attraction alone is simply insufficient to keep two people together, and that you need some kind of official endorsement of your commitment.

When one makes a loan to a friend or business acquaintance, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for a promissory note or a valuable to serve as collateral. But if one made the same loan to one's brother or sister, they would be highly offended if collateral were demanded. If you trust someone, then there is no need for the transaction to be guaranteed within an institutionalised framework. Their word is sufficient. It is only when one does not trust the other sufficiently that contracts become necessary. Similarly, if a man really feels for a woman and vice versa, then either might rightfully feel offended if the person to whom they have pledged their commitment demands a formal seal on the bond.

## Maimonides's view

The great medieval Jewish thinker Maimonides argued in his philosophical masterpiece *Guide to the Perplexed* that the reason the Almighty instituted that humans must marry, and especially in public, was to minimise the friction that would otherwise result from inter-human competition. Many men might compete for the affections and attentions of a single woman, thus creating a vast night-club scene, a cattle market where the forces governing human relationships would be indistinguishable from commercial, market forces. In order for humankind to live in peace, an institution that clearly marked people as attached and 'out of competition' was needed.

I do not intend to dismiss the Maimonidean explanation for marriage. Anyone knowledgeable of the singles' dating scene will know just how pertinent his explanation is and how often ethical questions arise because of relationships that take place outside marriage. I have been asked many times by young men whether it is ethical to pursue a friend's girlfriend who they think has taken a liking to them. After all, they argue, she's not his wife, and the relationship cannot

therefore be very serious. 'So long as they're not married, she's still fair game.'

## Feeling complete

We little realise that the question 'Why should we marry at all?' is predicated on a flawed perception of humanity. In today's world, we look upon ourselves as whole individuals. Although we readily acknowledge our imperfections, we do not see ourselves as being fundamentally incomplete.

But this assumption of wholeness makes us think that there can be no essential reason for marrying at all. If we are not missing anything in life, why search for a life-long partner? And even if we marry, this philosophy will lead us to discard our spouse the moment things heat up, since we believe we are intrinsically complete even without them.

By way of analogy, if a salesman of third arms approaches a man with two arms and tells him that he has just invented a third arm and would like to sell him one, the customer will be suspicious. 'I already have two arms. Why do I need a third?' The salesman makes his pitch. 'Just think of it: you could dial the phone, eat a sandwich, and drink your coffee all at the same time. You could carry more groceries to the car from the shop. You could walk the dog, smack your child, and brush your hair all at once. The possibilities are endless!' The customer is convinced and agrees to give it a try.

The first month everything goes well. The third arm really is a tremendous convenience, and it immeasurably enhances his life. But after a few weeks, it begins to play up. One morning it won't wake up at all, complaining it's too tired. The next morning it's temperamental, cantankerously needling its owner that it's not appreciated enough. The third morning it even has the audacity to slap the customer's face, saying that he is mean and uncaring. 'That's it,' says the customer. 'I've had enough.' And he returns the arm to the salesman.

But now imagine a man who, God forbid, was born without a second arm. Along comes a doctor, who says, 'We have been experimenting with a second-arm replacement, and would like to provide you with one. I can't guarantee that it will always be useful, obey your commands, or even always work properly.' Still, the patient decides to accept the arm, and although he experiences the same problems that the man with the third arm did, he sticks with it, feeling grateful that he has the second arm at all. He perseveres with the arm because he acknowledges his state of incompleteness. To the man with two arms, the third arm is superfluous; an added extra. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, you get rid of it. To the man with only one arm, the second mechanical arm is a blessing, even if it is not perfect.

## *Man and woman are one*

This is the radical difference between modern opinion and Judaism. The Bible does not play along with this notion that we are perfect. Instead it sees a man or woman as only one half of a potentially whole being. Each person is simply incomplete by him- or herself. No job, acquisition of knowledge, or praise from other human beings can ever change this. It is an anatomical *and* spiritual fact, which is rooted in the very constitution of man.

Most people would interpret the Biblical story of creation as saying that Adam was male, and that he searched for a female who was later given to him when God caused him to sleep and removed one of his ribs, thereafter covering it with flesh and creating womankind. Such an interpretation, however, places a very negative light on female qualities by implying that they are not in some way intrinsic to a human being, and that God created woman merely as an afterthought.

But the ancient Jewish interpretation of the Bible has always maintained that God created Adam in the Garden of Eden as a hybrid of both male and female. The traditional Jewish interpretation of these verses in Genesis suggests that the word *tzela*, usually translated as 'rib', here means 'side'. Adam was not the first man, but rather the first *human*, and was an androgynous being, possessing both masculine and feminine dimensions. When Adam fell asleep, God removed an entire side, the feminine side, from His creature, and the result was the splitting of the first human being into Adam, who remained male, and Eve, who became female.

The result was that each side was no longer complete and now depended on reuniting with the other half in order to achieve wholeness. This idea is also implicit in the word 'sex' itself. It derives from the Latin word *secare*, which means to cut or divide into sections. Marriage brings about the reunification of a once-complete organism that was separated at creation's outset. Therefore, marriage is perforce a religious institution. It is only He, who separated us at the beginning of time, who can once again fuse us together as one under the wedding canopy. Indeed, the ancient Jewish mystics maintained that husband and wife shared a single soul that was also rejoined when they married.

## *What about people who remain single?*

I recognise that what I am writing might be viewed quite negatively by those who are still single. Is someone who has not married, or who will never marry, incomplete? There can be no doubt that a single person can lead a very satisfying and full life, accomplish great things, and make significant contributions that can enhance the lot of all humanity. The Talmud tells of Rabbi Yonasan ben Uziel, the greatest disciple of Hillel the Elder, who was one of the leading and most respected Sages of Israel. So engrossed was he in the study of Torah that he never married. His mastery of Jewish law, and indeed his contributions to the development and codification of Jewish thought, are almost without parallel. Nevertheless, he was roundly criticised by the Talmud itself in spite of his apparent mastery.

This does not trivialise the important contribution that he made to Jewish life. What it does mean is that he would have been far more complete had he married. As the Bible states, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' I am friendly with many single confirmed bachelors and spinsters. Yet few of them remain single as a matter of conviction. Rather, they do so because, for a variety of reasons, they either did not find a marriageable partner to their tastes, or were burned in a previous relationship and fear being hurt again. Man is a universe to himself, but there are different levels in human completion for all of us. While the single person who endeavours his or her best to lead a loving and decent life is complete on one level, they still lack a greater form of completion that can be found only through finding one's other half and getting married.

The same is true of friendship and all other human relationships. We can lead life on our own, but the more people we have to share the warmth and light of human experience, the more enriched our life will be. In the Bible, man's soul is made analogous to a candle: when two flames are put near each other, they naturally incline toward one another. All of us are looking to share our light with someone we love, and the highest form is marriage, a union in which we join together and become one flesh.

## 8

# Marriage, a relationship based on fragility

*Why does a woman work ten years to change a man's habits and then complain that he's not the man she married?*

Barbra Streisand

*A good marriage lasts for ever. A bad one just seems to.*

Anonymous

One of the most difficult emotions experienced by students when they first arrive in Oxford is loneliness. For many it is because they are leaving home, often for the first time. For others, a sense of isolation is a by-product of the large workload greeting students upon their arrival. Still others feel a sense of solitude because of Oxford's greater emphasis on intellectual achievement than on emotional bonding. Oxford has one of the highest suicide rates of any university in the world. As I write these lines, just last week a student killed himself after breaking up with his girlfriend. He asked her to come outside so that he could tell her something, and as she emerged he hurled himself under an approaching rubbish-truck.

### *What is loneliness?*

But for all of us the awesome power of loneliness is indivisibly a part of our existence. At the beginning of the book of Genesis, the Bible discusses the loneliness of the first man, Adam. Every animal had a helpmate, a companion, but Adam did not. God, in His kindness, created for him a partner whom Adam called Eve. But why did Adam feel lonely in the first place? After all, he was living in the Garden of Eden and had all the angels with whom he could talk and hang out.

Adam's loneliness, according to the Rabbis, was caused by the fact that the angels were perfect and did not need anything from Adam. The angels, being whole and complete, could receive no contribution of substance from him. They didn't come to Adam with their problems because they had none. They didn't ask him his advice because their lives weren't in a mess. And they certainly didn't need to be comforted with a hug. In short, he needed them, but they did not need him. He was lonely because he could not give.

With the creation of Eve, Adam now had someone who, like him, was imperfect, and so needed his love as much as he needed hers. He had someone whose life he could touch; a being whose heart was made of flesh and not of perfection. Eve made him feel that his existence actually made a difference; she was a being who needed to be held and kept warm. Feeling necessary cured Adam's pangs of loneliness.

## *Being needed makes us feel content*

We do not feel lonely because we have no one with whom to share our lives. Rather, loneliness overtakes us when we feel that we are not necessary, when those who do share our lives do not appreciate our contribution. Loneliness hits us particularly when we discover suddenly, as the student above, that we are not needed. This is why people who find out that their spouse has had an affair describe it as the most severe pain they have ever experienced, as bad, God forbid, as a bereavement. Nothing hurts more deeply than being made to feel replaced and discarded.

But I have also met many women who are married and still profess themselves to be the loneliest people on earth. When you are married to a man who is a workaholic and who is successful enough that he has the public's approbation, he often shows his wife little attention because he corroborates his value with factors outside the marriage. He doesn't have to come home on time, and he doesn't have to consult her on the most important questions of his life. He has lawyers and business partners for that. Not surprisingly, the primary reason, according to every survey, for a wife's infidelity is her husband's neglect. Over 80 per cent of men who cheat on their wives still claim to love their wives. But only six per cent of women who love their husbands will cheat on them.

## *Acknowledging that you are insecure*

Ever since Karl Marx declared religion to be the opiate of the masses, religious people have been fighting a rearguard action, attempting to show how they embrace religion for the right reasons and not because of their insecurity. I, however, have no compunction in admitting that I need God and rely upon Him as the rock of my salvation, that I acknowledge that without God's providence and blessing, every effort is for nought, and that from the constraints and vulnerability and loneliness of human life I call out to my Creator for His love and protection. The highest form of love is to need someone, and those who cannot acknowledge a deeply-felt need unfortunately cannot love. Those who cannot acknowledge their vulnerability – who are afraid to rely on someone else – cannot truly become one with their partner. True love entails a feeling of helplessness when we are not in the company of our beloved.

Similarly, sharing a relationship with someone who is in touch with his or her insecurities is the only relief from loneliness. If there were no human insecurities, people would still relate with one another. But they would never become enmeshed and intertwined with each other. Sharing a relationship with a profoundly secure person (if there is such a thing) can be the loneliest experience of all because, while they cherish you, they don't depend on you.

## *Dropping your guard*

There is no more sublime way to express devotion to others, or to receive love from others, than through marriage, which compels people to put another person – their spouse – before them, always. Being a parent makes us feel needed at all times, and thus more able to rise above loneliness. Being a spouse, by needing our partner we allow them to love us. This is the ingenious solution provided by the Creator to ensure that, if we accept them, our anxieties about our imperfections are always assuaged.

Think what a difference it makes when we are needed. My wife and I called around to see our friend Tanya shortly after the birth of her first child. She looked radiantly happy with her new-born son. 'Do you know when I felt the most special being a mother?' she said. 'It was when I took the baby to Tesco's and put him down to look for the nappies section. It struck me that he just stayed there. Had I left him there he'd still be there now. He needs me even for his mobility. It feels wonderful to be so important to somebody!'

## *Healthy insecurity*

Far from shying away from a relationship built around assuaging our loneliness or insecurity, we should thank God that in our spouse we have someone who loves us and needs us always. In Judaism, when we toast our fellow human beings over wine or another alcoholic beverage, we say 'L'Chaim', which means not 'To Life', as many suppose, but rather 'To Lives', in the plural. No one could live life by

themselves. We all need someone else. Life only has meaning when it is shared with others, and we are strengthening and enriching their existence as well.

Manis Friedman tells the story of a woman who complained to him that she was not happily married and was contemplating a divorce. Amazingly, she conceded that her husband was always warm, affectionate, sensitive, and caring. 'So what's the problem?' he asked. She answered that she wasn't sure if in his heart of hearts he really and truly loved her. 'Lady,' Rabbi Friedman answered. 'You don't need a divorce. You need a spanking.'

The difference between healthy and unhealthy insecurity resides in the focus on action. If a husband or wife is treated marvellously by their spouse, yet they still feel insecure and look for imperfections and supposed slights in the relationship, then their insecurities might be said to have got the better of them. Get a grip.

But if someone is being treated badly – even if their spouse professes to love them – they can hardly be accused of merely being insecure. God made us incomplete, which means that vulnerability and loneliness come to us naturally. What we must always try to ensure is that these insecurities cause us to be more sensitive to the people around us. Our natural insecurities can undermine our lives by making us either arrogant, paranoid and tyrannical, or very uncertain and weak, all ensuring that people stay away. But our insecurities can also teach us caring and empathy whereby we come to understand the vulnerability of all humankind and everyone's need to feel love and appreciation.

To be sure, we cannot allow the comfort of a relationship to overwhelm us to the point that we smother our partner with love and never allow them out of our sight. Relationships built on extreme insecurity are sure to fail. But within a healthy margin, we are right to revel in the companionship that marriage provides. Once we have acquired this, we must not allow insecurity to consume us, especially through searching the inner recesses of our partner's heart to see if they really love us. Focus rather on action. A husband or wife who makes the effort to do the right thing in marriage and keep their spouse constantly happy is very precious indeed.

## 9

# Why parental love ceases to be sufficient

*And Isaac brought [Rebecca] into the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took her and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was finally comforted after the loss of his mother.*

Genesis 24: 67

*Mummy, you know the vase you were always worried I would break? Well, your worries are over.*

Anonymous

Several times a week parents of a Jewish 20- or 30-something will call me and pour out their sorrow over a child who is either seriously dating, or engaged to, a non-Jew. As the Jewish community's numbers are seriously dwindling, the subject of intermarriage is most painful. 'You call yourself a Rabbi? You should be ashamed of yourself. My son was raised in an orthodox home. I gave him life, warm clothes, a good education, and love. He knows better than to marry a non-Jew. My wife and I wish we were in our grave. But you have welcomed him at your table and treat him as if he's done nothing wrong. We haven't spoken to him in three years. Now a Rabbi betrays us. Disgraceful.' They may say this even if they realise that the Rabbi has a duty to ensure that such 'mixed' couples retain a strong affiliation with the Jewish community.

### *Parental love vs. romantic love*

Our parents love us to bits. And sometimes their love is so intense that it is even expressed as censure for something we've done which they maintain is very bad for us. But as we mature we find that the solace their love once provided diminishes and becomes less important to us. Suddenly all we can think of is the other sex. We want to find the man or woman of our dreams. For parents this is a difficult moment (as in the story above), for they argue that compared with our parents the man or woman we are after is a complete stranger. Yet we find this 'stranger's affection intensely more satisfying than that of our parents. Why?

Romantic love seems to be a very poor route to achieving fulfilment anyway. Whereas our parents seem to find merit in virtually everything we say, our verbal pronouncements to our romantic partners make an unpredictably favourable or unfavourable impression. Our actions either keep our partners and friends firmly attached to us, or send them running in the opposite direction. Our parents will never divorce us, but our spouses might. Why give it all up?

The answer is that although our parents love us dearly, they have no choice but to do so. Their genes make them love us. In many ways it is as if a gun is being held to their heads and they are told that they must cherish and adore their children.

The beauty and strength of this also contains its weakness. When a teenage girl hears her mother tell her that she is the prettiest in the neighbourhood, is her mother telling her the truth? When a father tells his son how intelligent and mature he is, does this mean it is true? Parents love us with all their hearts, and of course they are going to say, and think, the best of us. What they cannot give us is the knowledge that we are unique people who can earn such love through our own devices.

### *What we really, really want*

What we must remember is that the greatest human aspiration is not to be loved, but to be *special*, to be distinguishable from all others on our planet. This is one of the things that bothers people most when they are approached by demographic pollsters. They don't want to be just another statistic. They want to be individuals, who are different from their neighbours and relatives, who are special, singular, and unique.

In the depths of our hearts we know that we are irreplaceable. In the same way that no two people look alike, no two people *are* alike. Every soldier wants to be promoted, every artist wants to be recognised, and every human being wants to be chosen. There is a unique contribution to the world that only we can make.

Our early lives can be wrecked by an absence of feeling unique. We feel torn asunder as children when we feel neglected by our parents. 'Am I not special?' we ask ourselves. 'Who will make me feel that way?' And we may spend the rest of our life racked by self-doubt and insecurity. Likewise, every one of us fears that if we didn't wake up tomorrow morning, perhaps nobody would even notice, nobody would care. We fear being alive and remaining unremarkable.

### *The power of romantic love*

When we are teenagers we are consumed by a similar fear of nothingness. We start to wonder about the attention of our parents. How often do we hear of young people taking their own lives and leaving messages behind that say, in essence, 'Now you'll notice me. When I was alive you ignored me. You may not have noticed my presence then, but you will certainly notice my absence when I am dead.'

But our partners make us feel special precisely because, unlike our parents, they choose us. When they tell us we are beautiful, we believe them, because nothing compelled them to say it. Moreover, they could have made the same declaration to countless other people. Our lover has recognised our unique beauty and *chosen* to be with us over and above all others.

### *Marriage and the divine*

The Bible declares that each of us is created in the image of God. This means that in the same way that God is the one and only, so too each of us is the one and only. Because we are all created in the image of God we possess a fragment of the divine within us which we can realise. But it comes at a price. We shall never find full satisfaction or happiness in life until we have realised how important our partners are for that aspect of ourselves. We must constantly make an effort to remain in touch with our divine essence.

Marriage, then, becomes more than something that solidifies human affection. Rather, it is a psychological necessity: being chosen by a stranger in a non-coercive way for a lifelong commitment is the ultimate corroboration of our uniqueness. Therefore, when problems arise in our marriage, rather than just immediately search for the escape hatch, we should remember the strong completion of our intrinsic selves which marriage brings, and always seek to work the problems out.

PART FOUR

# Marriage and Divorce

## 1

# Is divorce ever a good thing?

*A man never knows the value of a woman's love until he pays maintenance.*

Anonymous

*One major reason for divorce is that husbands who promised they would die for their wives, failed to deliver.*

Anonymous

*The heaviest object in the world is the body of the woman you have ceased to love.*

Marquis de Luc de Clapiers Vauenargues

I have a policy of never giving up a free meal (or anything else free for that matter). So when Maureen called up exhilarated and excited, 'Quick, get Debbie, I'm taking you all out to dinner,' I was delighted. But when she explained, 'I'm officially divorced. I'm rid of that bastard for ever,' I felt the need to violate my principles: 'Look, Maureen, we'll of course come out to dinner with you, but not as a celebration of your divorce. Let's celebrate your being happy, without being specific.' My friend got very offended. 'You know how unhappy I was with him and how much he used me. And now he's gone, and if you're not happy for me, then it's just your tough luck.' 'Maureen,' I said, 'if God forbid someone needed chemotherapy to rid themselves of disease, we wouldn't be partying for that, because it's a necessary but not a good thing.'

## *My spouse, my child*

Suppose you can't have children, and would like to adopt. But before making the decision to adopt, you tell the adoption board that you're very happy to take a child home, but only on the condition that if things do not work out you have the right to return him or her to the agency. Would you condone that attitude? Of course not. Anyone making such a condition would be treating the baby not as their child, but rather as some sort of boarder. Their commitment to the child remains tenuous and ephemeral, completely unlike the bond which exists between parent and child.

This can be applied to marriage too. When you fail to commit yourself to a relationship, and settle for just living together as opposed to marrying, this is a statement of your recognition that the relationship is transitory. Marrying actually helps us fall more deeply in love with each other, because we know that someone is prepared to commit themselves to us for the rest of their life.

## *Understanding what divorce means*

Divorce is essentially a separation of oneself from oneself. Once we view our married partners as those who complete us, and thus as an actual and vital part of ourselves, we understand that divorce becomes a justified recourse only in the most acute circumstances. To see one's spouse as a part of oneself, as a limb, as it were, exposes what divorce is about. Although I am readily prepared to dispose of a car which causes more anguish than pleasure, the same is not true of my arm, since to lose it would be to be incomplete.

This is not to say that divorce is never necessary. Because God is compassionate, He does not force a man and a woman who loathe each other to live together. To do so would be unspeakably cruel. People have a right to find happiness in life, and if after exerting every effort to make a marriage work, a couple still feel miserable, they must dissolve their union. None the less, the Talmud says that God's holy altar weeps for every couple who divorce. It is only a necessary outlet for two people who cannot live together in harmony and love.

## *My own experience as a child*

Being a product of a broken home, I find it still bothers me that there are children of similar homes who will actually speak about their parents' divorce as if it were a good thing. They say, 'Thank heavens my parents finally got divorced! They were just killing each other. They're both better off this way.' Surely they are mistaken. Our parents would have been better off being happily married.

My whole life was affected by my parents' divorce. As a child, I saw the relationship that brought me into the world dissolve, and I no longer knew where I fitted in, or where I would ever fit in. I looked forward neither to happiness, nor to peace. When a doctor recently asked me in Synagogue if I thought that his recent divorce from his wife of 16 years would have any effect on their son, I said, 'It's like asking whether discovering that the sun won't shine tomorrow, or that the body has no immune system, will have any effect on one's outlook on life.'

In life, we're always sure that there is some fail-safe system, some safety net, something that will stop the ultimate calamity from happening. But once your parents divorce, you're no longer so sure. OK, death also overtakes us. But at least there we concede that there is little that we can do. Life and death are not in our control. But marriage and divorce are.

### The negative cycle of divorce

Once I was speaking with an Oxford student whose parents are divorced. Most of her friends also come from broken homes. She was intensely hostile to marriage and was adamant that living together provided a far better alternative. As far as she was concerned, the only genuine and coherent argument for marriage arises if someone is religious. For people who do not live by religious tenets, and therefore cannot be classified as living in sin, marriage, she argued, was utterly meaningless. Her group of friends added that the only reason people still marry is to conform to social convention. As all their arguments were negative, I didn't need to be a prophet to guess that every single one of them had divorced parents or parents whose marriage was severely unhappy.

The negative cycle of divorce is the imprint it leaves on second generations. Studies show that children from divorced backgrounds are 50 per cent more likely to divorce themselves. And according to this student and her friends, all the people whom they knew who had been married for more than five years were miserable. Their view of marriage was utterly pessimistic. The world's largest club consists of children of divorce. But we who are the members of this club have the greatest challenge of all: to break, with the help of God, this terrible cycle of pain and despair which marital strife breeds and to bequeath to our children a world filled with love, light, and hope.

## 2

# Your spouse's impossible flaws

*I have three pets at home which answer to the same purpose as a husband: I have a dog which growls every morning, a parrot which swears all afternoon, and a cat that comes home late at night.*

Marie Corelli

*She wanted a husband and put an advertisement in the Personal Column. She got 200 replies, all saying: 'You can have mine.'*

Anonymous

Rabbi Aryeh Levine, a saintly Sage who lived 50 years ago in Jerusalem, described how once he saw a close friend of his very late at night at the hospital. His friend seemed perfectly fit, so Rabbi Levine enquired why he was at the hospital in the middle of the night. The man pointed to his aged wife who was limping behind him and said, 'Reb Aryeh, *our* foot hurts.' Not, 'This darned wife of mine has got this lousy foot that keeps me up in the middle of the night,' but rather, '*We* have a problem so we both came here in middle of the night to sort it out. My wife's problems are my problems since we are one.'

We must make a conscious effort not to forget that one's spouse is one's other half. The woman with whom you now argue is not a stranger, she is your wife. And the man whom you are so disappointed with is not some supermarket checkout clerk, he is the father of your children. To harm your spouse is to harm yourself. To fall out with them is to fall out with yourself. If they are unhappy, you are going to be unhappy. Your spouse is a part of you.

### *An aggressive spouse*

I mentioned this to Nancy, who came to talk to me after another terrible fight with her husband. He had a bad temper. He was not violent. But when he lost his cool, he would verbally abuse her, telling her how stupid she was. She could usually bear it because arguments this serious only took place, at most, once a month. But the terrible pressures of opening a new business had made Gary even more temperamental, and now he was blowing up at her several times a week. 'I can't live with this man and his terrible temper,' she said. 'I want to be married, but I am miserable. I can't imagine staying with him any longer unless he deals with his problem.'

'I think it would be very helpful,' I replied, 'if you didn't speak about *his* problem. Since you are married, his temper is not solely his problem. It is the problem of both of you. And if you saw it in this way, you wouldn't think of abandoning him. It does not excuse his behaviour, which has no justification and must change. But the chances of him changing are far greater when both your energies are thrown at it, rather than when he is asked to change on his own. I know a woman whose son has a terrible speech impediment. She is far from rich, and yet twice a week she must take three hours of uncompensated time off work and drive her son one hour in each direction to a speech therapist. Yet never have I once heard her say, "It is my son's problem." Her attitude is that she as a mother has a problem.'

Marriage is not just a human decision, or a socio-economic arrangement. It is in Judaism the Almighty Himself who determines who will marry whom. The Talmud declares that God's most difficult task is serving as a matchmaker. He finds it a greater challenge than parting the Red Sea. A husband and wife are two halves of one soul who are separated prior to their descent from heaven to earth. Under the 'chupa', the wedding canopy, they are reunited as one. And they emerge as a one. A man's wife has always been his wife, just as his child has always been his child. Indeed, the feeling that one just 'bumped into' one's spouse in a completely arbitrary way is one of the most destructive of all attitudes in marriage. Anything we view as having occurred 'arbitrarily' is something to which we will feel far less devoted.

### *The effect of marriage*

A friend of mine was experiencing severe marital difficulties and I went to see him and his wife to explore whether I could help iron out their differences. I was astonished to discover that my friend's father was very upset with me. 'Why did you interfere?' he asked me. 'She is wrong for him, and the entire family wants him to get rid of her. In fact, we've already started looking for someone else. We're going to introduce him to someone better.'

'Someone better?' I asked. 'But he's a married man! How can you ask a married man to take someone else out? And what do you mean by wanting to get rid of her? She is not some stranger. For goodness sake, she is his wife! People who marry have been joined as one flesh in the most profound possible way.'

This merging as one is a most potent feeling. Once on an ordinary Monday afternoon, I returned home for lunch from my office and my wife greeted me with an immense smile and these words: 'You're not going to believe how beautiful this is!' She picked up a handsomely bound red book entitled *The Wolf Shall Lie With the Lamb*. It was the first copy of my book, which my United States publisher had sent. I had waited two years since the completion of the manuscript to see it in published from and I was ecstatic. But I focused more on my wife's joy than on my own, and something puzzled me: she was just as elated as excited as me, and yet it was I who had written the book!

It was not my book, or a book that my wife could celebrate because it had been written by her husband. Rather, it was *our* book. Anything I had written was equally hers. Any insights offered in that book largely derived from conversations with my wife. When she showed people the book she was showing something that was hers. (She firmly disclaims, however, any association with this book on sex.) This oneness, which is there all the time whether we are conscious of it or not, is what we have to keep in mind when we deal with the rough side of our spouse's personality. If your spouse has a problem with being too critical, it is *both* your problem, and you must tackle it as a couple to make it disappear.

## 3

# Adultery, such fun?

*With all my heart. Whose wife shall it be?*

John Horne Tooke, replying to the suggestion that he take a wife

*When a man marries his mistress, she leaves a vacancy.*

James Goldsmith's *maîtresse*

Those who cheat on their spouses are convinced that their partners in crime think highly of them. With all the attention and gifts he lavishes on her, the adulterous husband is under the impression that the woman with whom he fools around finds him romantic, caring and sexy. However, studies reveal the opposite. Most mistresses of married men believe them to be unimpressive cowards who cheat and vacillate, offending all parties in turn. They may indeed find them attractive, but they also find them hypocritical, unfaithful, untrustworthy, duplicitous, weak, and downright dishonest.

The *Hite Report on Love, Passion, and Emotional Violence* quotes many examples of what women really think of unfaithful husbands with whom they have an affair. One woman comments, 'At about 20 I flirted with a married man who told me how bad his marriage/wife was. Something might have happened but I met his wife – she was a beautiful, nice mother of four with a jerk for a husband.' Another woman writes, 'I was infatuated with a married man for a short while during my first year in college. I came to see him as a real wimp for limping along in his relationship with his wife and decided to save myself all this bother and hassle by breaking off with him.'

Indeed, no matter how sexy or alluring a man's mistress finds him, there will never be security in the relationship. Even if he runs off with her and marries her, pledging himself to her eternally, she cannot shake what she knows to be the truth: that she will never be completely free of the worry that perhaps he is cheating on her as well.

## *Nomadic passion*

In the book of Genesis, Esau, elder brother of Jacob, sells his birthright to his younger brother for a plate of porridge, thereby squandering his privileges as a firstborn. Why did he do it? Well, he felt hungry. The Rabbis explain that he had had an extremely busy day. Among other things, he had murdered a man, and stolen his wife. This brief mention of Esau's adultery is not incidental but central to the plot.

What the Bible tells us is that the adulterer is like Esau, a nomad, a hunter, a man who lives from day to day, who has no permanence and whose existence is entirely fly-by-night. He eats the beast of the field and makes his bed wherever it is most convenient. Today he personifies all too many men and women who think that life is only about excitement and instant gratification, who have no appreciation of anything deep and lasting.

Like Esau, the adulterer convinces himself that he is an explorer, though really he is a wanderer. He thinks to himself he is not a bad person, but merely broadening his sexual experience and taste. He does not intend to harm his marriage. He will argue that he loves his wife, and what is so wrong with just a bit of excitement and pleasure? But like Esau he has gone from being a man of strength and commitment to being a weakling. He will always be on the move, for he has lost the anchor of his personality.

This lifestyle may indeed lead to passion, in the same way

that the jungle explorer's life might be construed to be more exciting than that of the grocery-store salesman. But it is a false excitement born of disorientation. What the adulterer refuses to see is the transitory nature of his passion and the way in which he scars himself. Like Esau he will remain a nomad, never achieving the sense of completion that Jacob finds through disciplined and committed relationships.

## *The spirit of madness*

The Talmud declares that no one sins unless gripped by a spirit of madness. This, one of my favourite Talmudic quotes, simply states the obvious: for if the average person were to think through all the consequences of their transgression, they would never do it. We sin because we just don't think. The delights of adultery don't really exist. Sure, for a few moments or even weeks the pleasure is there. But compared to the infinite misery which this is all leading to, there will be scarce memories of pleasure. Once your life begins to self-destruct and your spouse abandons you, you will wish that you kept your pants on.

Let's say you go ahead with the affair. You continue seeing your lover and develop real passion. You will then arrive at the point where you have to make a choice between your spouse and your lover. And don't fool yourself into thinking the two can coexist. For they cannot. Every act of love with your illicit lover is a stab in the heart of your other half.

Whatever energy you are putting into your affair is being taken away from your marriage. The real sin of adultery is not so much a sin of *commission* – doing something wrong – as a sin of *omission* – failing to do something right. No marriage on the planet can survive the complete redirection of love and sexual focus which is involved in having an adulterous partner. And whatever interest you are showing your lover, you are not showing to your spouse. When the reason for this is found out, spouses will bring the rafters in the ceiling down rather than allow their humiliation to continue. In every act of adultery the adulterer hurts themselves; because to hurt one's spouse is, literally, to hurt oneself.

No one can retain their marital passion towards their spouse when they are expending it in such vast quantities on someone else. Ironically, this is more true for women than for men, as psychologist Carol Botwin explains: 'Most men, even when they have some affection for the other woman, are able to keep an affair from taking over their emotional lives. This is in direct contrast to women, who tend to become consumed. In letter after letter, case history after case history, wives confessed that their heads were totally occupied by their lovers.'

But for any cuckolded spouse, the anger and pain of betrayal will find expression specifically in their married life. In the Bible it is written that God made Eve as a 'helpmate for Adam'. But the Hebrew word 'for' also translates as 'against'. The Talmud explains that when a man loves his wife, she becomes 'for' him, a helpmate. When he neglects or abuses her, she becomes 'against' him. Her former marriage goodwill gradually oozes out, and she finds every reason in the world to quarrel with him. Her friends see her and hate her husband for snuffing out the fire in her soul.

And ultimately no real benefit lies in store for the adulterer. A dentist I knew had an affair. The woman insisted that he leave his wife for her or she too would leave. 'It's a difficult choice,' he told me. 'I'm crazy about this new woman, but I love my children, and I guess I also love my wife.' I told him, 'Once the mistress is always available, she loses her mystique and the sex its forbidden excitement. You will give up your wife and get nothing in return. Since you haven't learned how to bring newness and novelty into an existing relationship, you will be just as bored with your new wife the moment you start living with her, and the cycle will just repeat itself. Rather than destroying your life and your family, go back to your wife and make an all-out effort to reignite the spark of your marriage.' He disagreed, left his wife and family for the other woman, and, indeed, eighteen months later he was as bored with the new woman as he had been with his wife and ended up leaving her as well.

This is a common occurrence: 80 per cent of all men who leave their wives for another woman end up leaving the new woman within the first year; and no wonder. If a man cannot learn to find vertical renewal in his marriage – unearthing novel and exciting aspects of the relationship – all he is capable of is bed-hopping.

## *One-night stands*

But suppose your fling does not develop into an affair. You will still lose out. When the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai lay dying, his students asked him to bless them before he expired. 'I bless you that you should all learn to fear God as much as you fear your fellow man.' His students were aghast. 'Is that all? You only wish us to fear heaven as much as we fear humans, and no more?' Rabbi Yochanan responded, 'Whenever a man is about to sin, and he sees that people are watching him, he refrains from sinning. It would be wonderful if we feared God watching us just as much.'

Sin causes us to develop a dual personality. If Carol slanders her friend Susan behind her back, then the next time they meet Carol will have to hide her real feelings and actions from Susan. The real loser here is not Susan but Carol, who must now conceal a whole dimension of her personality and, in doing so, develops a split personality. She can never just be herself around Susan ever again. And the more she gossips about other people behind their backs, the more pervasive her dual identity becomes, until she has no rest in any of her relationships.

One's spouse ought to be the one person in the world with whom you can be totally natural. But for the adulterer, every time a phone bill arrives at the house, it is a moment of anxiety. 'Did I remember not to call my mistress from the house?' Every credit card bill might give you away. After a while, your own home becomes a hellish den for you, as you are permanently on pins and needles, fearing that you will be discovered. And you had better remember your lies as well, so that you don't give yourself away. Indeed, you will have to tell bigger and bigger lies in order to cover over the smaller ones.

What is the point? Do we ever take a break from being a parent to our children? Do we sneak out at night to read a bedtime story to our neighbour's child who is good at maths and never gets into trouble? Do we tell them, 'I know you are not my son, but tonight, for once, I would really like to pretend you are and see what it's like. But don't tell Mikey. It must remain *our* secret.' Cheating on our children is an absurd prospect because we see our children as our own flesh and blood. And a husband and wife who practise kosher sex to become one flesh will likewise preclude the possibility of ever cheating on each other.

## *Adultery, a call of nature*

Of course, the adulterous partner will argue that they felt forced into it. They were not looking to hurt anyone, least of all themselves. They merely gave in to lust and desire. But it had little to do with them. They will begin to cite neglect on the part of their spouse as an excuse. And if they are not loved, or if there is no passion in their marriage, what are they to do? Don't they deserve some measure of happiness in their lives? And, really, when they met their mistress adultery was the last thing on their mind. It kind of happened by default.

Who are they kidding? They *do* deserve all the passion they want. But instead of working hard and regaining the passion in their marriage, they are allowing events to take control of their lives. The solution is rather to make your wife into your mistress, your husband into your secret lover, and make your marriage into an illicit affair.

## *Being a great person*

There are two kinds of human greatness. One is the recognition that comes about through an association with a great man or woman. Of this type, the ancient Rabbis said, 'The slave of a king is treated as a king.' But there are also those who are themselves great individuals, irrespective of contacts or trappings of office. They have inner greatness. Observe a figure like Henry Kissinger, the only American Secretary of State who even after leaving office is still extensively consulted on international affairs. These people become great not through their office, but rather through the wisdom of their decisions.

The good news is that we can all be great. Great men and women understand that marriage can be difficult, and that sometimes the novelty and excitement can wear off. But far from succumbing to this they work hard to sustain their passion. They refuse to concede that they must find excitement in someone else's bed. And their rewards are immeasurable. They enjoy the most satisfying intimate lives because they have excitement coupled with love and a feeling of loyalty and goodness. They feel good about themselves and good about their partners. They know that they are doing the right thing.

What a man or woman who feels the itch to cheat should do is immediately grab their spouse, and run out and do something truly exciting and novel. Undertake something that will surprise even you. Remember, your marriage is your life. Don't try to lead someone else's life. You belong to each other. Your responsibility is to look after your portion in life. So make it glorious. On his deathbed, the great Rabbi Zusya of Anipoli was asked why he was crying: 'When I come before the heavenly throne and the Almighty asks me why I wasn't I as great as Abraham, I will respond, "Because, Lord, you did not create me to be Abraham." And when the Almighty asks me why I did not lead a life as great as Moses, I will respond, "Lord, I was not Moses." But when God says to me, "Why weren't you at least Zusya?" what then will I answer?'

### 4

# Becoming desirable again

*Since Kinsey's original sex surveys, almost all research has revealed a link between premarital sexual experience and extramarital adventures. The more of the first, the greater the likelihood of the second.*

Carol Botwin, *Tempted Women*

*Translations (like wives) are seldom faithful if they are in the least attractive.*

Samuel Johnson to James Boswell

In the 1960s, society consumed a terrible lie without ever questioning it. That lie was that people love sex so much that we must indulge each and every desire for it. We were also told that however much we indulge, we will never tire of sex. Today, doubtless as a consequence, the majority of the population have given up on monogamy. The divorce rate currently stands at 50 per cent of the married population. Of those who remain married, 75 per cent of husbands, and 50 per cent of wives are committing, or have committed, adultery. And even amongst more or less monogamous couples, only a small percentage find ongoing passion and excitement in marriage, and what its rewards are.

But imagine the kind of marriage these couples have. Author Naura Hayden describes how, when she was flying to Los Angeles with her close friend Helen Gurley Brown, the editor of *Cosmopolitan* in the US, she noticed that Helen exuded such an aura of confidence and sexiness that when she walked along the aisle all of the men turned their heads to look at her. Objectively speaking her friend is not the most beautiful woman in the world, so she decided to ask her what it was about her that men find so appealing. Helen Brown replied that her husband was the most wonderful man in the world. He makes her feel like the sexiest woman anywhere, so she walks and behaves that way.

Imagine what you could have if you would make your wife feel like your mistress. If you put her before everything: your job, career, money, and every other woman. Your wife would be passionately attracted to you. She would feel desirable all of the time. For these are the things that matter. In his classic novel of infidelity, Tolstoy portrays Anna Karenina as always dressing up beautifully for her paramour, Count Vronsky, even when no one else is in the house. She has a lover who makes her feel sexy and wanted, so she naturally lives up to the role in her daily actions, even when there is no one to watch.

## *Becoming a creator*

In one of its most significant and famous pronouncements, the Bible declares that God created man in His own image. From time immemorial, theologians of all denominations have debated what exactly this means. To me, the application of this teaching is in everyday life, and its meaning is clear. In the same way that God is a Creator, so is man. I don't mean here having children. Rather, every time we show someone extravagant attention and affection, we make them feel important, and we really and truly 'create' them, and bring them to life.

We have the capacity with our minds, our creativity and ingenuity, to make our partners feel special and desirable. When a husband shows his wife that to him she is the sexiest woman in the world, this is what she truly becomes. She starts dressing with great attention, carrying herself with greater audacity, and attracts the stares of all the men

around her. One of the principal things that gives away a husband or wife who is having an extramarital affair is the fact that they now spend much more time and trouble on looking attractive.

You must believe and accept as fact that lurking deep within each and every husband and wife is a deeply passionate, sensual, and sexy being. If the person you are married to has a heart in their breast that beats, and if they are not physically in a coma, then they also have a hidden fire burning in their heart, waiting to be discovered. When this is not indicated overtly, it must be brought to the fore by extreme focus and the incredible love, affection, and desire which only you can show your spouse. Some people are born extrovert, naturally sexy. But the majority are born with the potential to be exciting and sexy. What it takes is someone to give them the confidence that they are beautiful and should therefore not fear coming out of their shell.

## *Resurrecting our libidos from the dead*

Central to the psychological well-being of humankind is not just the need for a quiet permanent life, but also the need for passion and excitement. There is no need to go outside the marriage to keep this alive; everything we want is right here.

I can't accept that people's sexual drive just begins to die or that husbands and wives have different libidos. If you like your home and are committed to living in it, you will beautify it and develop an interest in it which renews itself constantly. If, however, you spend almost no time at home, preferring instead hotel rooms, looking at estate agents' pictures or hanging out in your car, you will have far less impetus to try and put things in the house right. If someone's house looks awful and dull, it is because they don't care much about it. Going to your neighbour's house and being jealous because of its beauty is not the answer.

Ask yourself honestly: does the TV get turned on the moment you come home? How quickly do you pick up a magazine or run to make a phone call? Do you in some way make your spouse feel as if they are non-existent? You've got to get everyone else off your mind and focus all of your sexual energy on your spouse. Remember that human sexuality is entirely cerebral; discarding the appeal of your spouse in your own mind has made them boring and monotonous. You must be committed to your other half. Or someone else will do it for you.

## 5

# Kosher desires

***The fact that you're allowed to marry another woman, in addition to your wife, makes you hesitate about having an affair with another woman.***

Dr Muhammed Sha'alan, commenting on polygamy

***Flirtation is merely an expression of considered desire coupled with an admission of its impracticability.***

Marya Mannes

***You yawn at one another,/ You treat him like a brother!/ He treats you like his mother!/ Then there's no doubt, the fire's out./ A lady needs a change!***

Dorothy Fields

***When a man steals your wife, there is no greater revenge than letting him keep her.***

Sacha Guitry

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The word I hate the most in the English language and which is also incidentally one of the most commonly used in today's vernacular is 'relationship'. Once upon a time, the feelings that a couple felt for one another were connoted by 'marriage' and 'engagement'. But now even married people can have a 'relationship'. This vagueness is reflected in the euphemisms people use for today's courting among men and women: 'seeing someone', 'dating someone', 'going out'. All of these descriptions are so casual. What does it mean, to be 'seeing' someone? Is it the same as just looking at an object? Is it similar to the way a child glances out of a window? The way one looks at animals in a zoo?

All this has led to a new type of anxiety. I asked a new student whether he knew a close friend of mine at his college. 'I do know him and I think he's a jerk.' 'Why do you say that?' I asked. 'Because,' he said, 'he's tried for years to pick up my girlfriend.' But was that a crime? Just how serious is 'a girlfriend'? Is trying to pick up someone else's girlfriend as serious as if she were someone's wife? When I confronted my friend with these allegations, he dismissed them, saying that the couple in question had had one of those on-off relationships for years.

A female student told me the story of how she invited a man from her college to the annual ball and even paid for his ticket. There she was sitting, feeling that it was wonderful to have a partner at the ball, when she noticed that he was completely absorbed by another woman sitting to his right. Ten minutes later, she turned around again and he was gone. They just skipped the ball together. Is that ethical? After all, she was only on a date with him. What obligations, then, did he have toward her? She was very hurt and believed that the man had behaved like an animal, but did he do something wrong?

And a former Oxford student now back at his native American university wrote me an e-mail: 'Shmuley, I have an ethical dilemma and want to hear your opinion. There is a girl whom I have found who I am sure is my soul-mate. The most perfect and wonderful woman in the world. There is one problem, however. She is someone's girlfriend. Is it at all ethical for me to pursue her? What would Judaism say? I also think she likes me. Does that make my case any better?' In another age, it would have been easy for me to respond that it is totally unethical to come between people who are dating, because back then most people dated in order to marry. But are matters still that unequivocal today?

## *The task of outsiders*

I am glad to say that marriage is still considered something special. A highly promiscuous male friend told me that although he loved women, all types of women, he would never touch a married woman, even though the opportunity had presented itself on many occasions. 'I don't consider myself a good person, and I could never be married. I just couldn't sustain the commitment. But the fact that there are people out there who do believe, and have married, is a great ray of hope for me that there are still beautiful things in this lonely world. And I never want to contaminate that.' If he felt that he was more and more attracted to someone's wife, he would simply imagine that she was near enough to be admired, but other than that way beyond his grasp.

The Talmud lists ten human actions for which God promises a reward not just in the afterlife, but in this world as well. Included in this list is helping to bring a husband and wife closer together. The rules are obvious enough. Never shame a man in front of his wife, even accidentally. Don't call a wife by a nickname which she finds derogatory. Don't try to be funnier than a husband in his home, especially if personality is not one of his strong points. Don't raise subjects in conversation around a married couple that will make a husband seem ignorant in front of his wife, or vice versa. Always try to engage both of them in conversation, as a couple. Allow the woman of the house to look best. And never think of another man's wife or another woman's husband while having sex in order to stimulate yourself. This is supremely unkosher.

Indeed, many stories of the pious Rabbis of old revolve around the great lengths to which they would go in order not to embarrass a husband in front of his wife. One such story involves Yankel the newlywed, who touched the candelabra during a Sabbath meal with the great spiritual master Rabbi Mendel. Yankel's young wife Perel was aghast and berated Yankel for his ignorance: 'Don't you know that touching a candelabra on the Sabbath is forbidden?' Asked for his opinion, the great Rabbi Mendel suggested that as the law is a difficult one he would look it up at home. After lunch Rabbi Mendel's own wife queried, 'Why did you lie? You are the one of the greatest Jewish scholars in Europe. You know the law. A candelabra cannot be touched on the Sabbath. Why did you not correct Yankel when he moved it?' Mendel replied, 'Better I make a fool of myself than a husband be made to look like a fool in front of his wife.'

### *Getting close to a member of the opposite sex*

But what should a man do if he starts feeling strongly attracted to a woman who is not his wife? What should a neglected wife do if a man begins to pay her enormous attention, and she finds herself thinking about him more and more? The ancient Rabbis explain: man has no natural desire for things he cannot possibly attain. We are not jealous of a bird's ability to fly because we know that such things are totally outside our reach. We rid ourselves of covetousness by accepting in our own minds that what belongs to our fellow in all justice belongs to them and not to us. Therefore, if you understand that a married couple belong to each other you would not dream of interfering. Similarly, we are usually not interested in men or women who do not reciprocate our interest. Convince yourself that you have been deluding yourself in thinking that the illicit person in question is actually interested.

A publisher of adult magazines in Britain explained to me why British porn is so down-market compared with the pictures of world-class models who take off their clothes for *Playboy* and *Penthouse* in the United States. The average guy who buys an adult magazine in Britain is blue-collar,

working class, he explained to me. So if he buys a magazine with pictures of women who are used to being picked up in Ferraris and taken to dine in three-star Michelin restaurants, he's not even excited by these girls because he thinks to himself, 'I could never have her.' But if he sees a picture of a nude woman whose hobbies are going to the local McDonald's or having a pint at the pub, he gets turned on because this is the kind of girl he meets, and he thinks that this girl would respond to his advances.

The fact that a man or a woman is married sets them apart from the rest of society and ensures that they are not competed for since the pursuit is seen as unrealistic. If a man meets a woman whom he fancies, upon discovering that she is married he should immediately cease coveting her, since he understands that as a loyal wife she is outside his reach. Likewise, he respects the commitment of marriage, and he has no desire to take that which by right belongs to his fellow.

Similarly, if we are married we must think of ourselves as being owned and possessed by someone else. We have undertaken serious commitments to our spouse, which preclude sharing intimacy with a stranger. If we just take the time to contemplate the fact that we are married, we will stop entertaining romantic possibilities with strangers, and instead focus our need for romance with our spouse.

### *Non-sexual relationships*

What if a spouse becomes incredibly close to a member of the opposite sex without actually consummating their attraction? Increasingly, modern-day affairs do not involve sex. This is especially true of men and women who work together. As psychologist Bonnie Eaker Weil states in her book on adultery, 'In fact, these "affairs of the heart" can be even more treacherous than the purely physical kind. Women, particularly, are inclined to leave their husbands when they feel a strong emotional bond with another man. This is especially likely if they did not marry for love or if they want to get out of a marriage but don't know how. Any activity or relationship that drains too much time and energy from life with your partner is a form of unfaithfulness. That may include workaholism, obsession with children, sports or gambling addiction, as well as emotional liaisons.'

The best way to determine if you are becoming too close to your friend is to focus honestly on the amount of time you think about that friend. If you are married and invent excuses or unimportant reasons to see them, the alarm bells should be going off in your head. This isn't healthy. Your thoughts should be about your spouse and family – not about a stranger with whom you have every right to share your time, but not to be obsessed with. If you're staying at work later than you have to, with precious little to do save be with an office associate who is a close friend, you should be going home to your spouse. When travelling on business, you *should* feel lonely. A husband should miss and need his wife, and a wife should pine for her husband. If it is to hard to bear then you should not be travelling so much. If travelling is part of your job, and you feel the need for illicit male or female companionship because of loneliness, then go and get a different job. Put your spouse first, always!

## 6

# Children, yes or no?

*Jews were too busy having children to bother with sex.*

*World of Shalom Aleichem*

*Sow your wild oats on Saturday night, and pray for a crop failure on Sunday.*

Anonymous

Many people refrain from having children, especially in the early years of marriage, for reasons which, they claim, are not selfish. They want an opportunity to get to know each other better before their children command all their attention. How can they enjoy sex on the dining-room table when the baby is crying, the toilet is overflowing from Barbie dolls flushed down the pipes, and the kids come running into the bedroom at the worst possible moments, forcing Mum and Dad to deliver the most outlandish explanations as to why they are huddled together with no clothes on. 'It's OK, Mikey. Go back to sleep. Daddy was just playing the new interactive Tarzan game on your Nintendo with Mummy.'

### *But how right are they?*

When we get married we think we know what love means. But we have no idea what lies in store for us. The principal problem with romantic relationships and marriage is the ephemeral nature of the emotion. The man who seemed so mature and sexy now seems like a dirty beast when you first do his laundry. The woman you couldn't live without yesterday is the same woman you find impossible to share a room with today. The man who set your heart on fire leaves you cold now that you have witnessed his selfishness. The love is still there, but where did the intensity go? At this stage we haven't got a clue that children will revive our passion. And those who wait stand a good chance of never finding out.

## *What children teach us*

Children increase our freedom. They expose us to their innocence, by giving us their unconditional trust. When we come home from work with the entire world's problems on our shoulders and discover our children, oblivious of all the earth's heartache, happily awaiting our return, we are instantly reminded of the truly important things in life. And through that innocence we find the strength to confront the world and all its turmoil once again. Children release us from the tyranny of everyday concerns and allow us to put things in perspective.

Our kids couldn't care less where we work or what we earn, and all they really require is our time and attention. We look at our children and say to ourselves that so long as they are healthy, nothing else matters.

Of course, children can be spoiled, noisy and bratty, but they are not vindictive and we therefore feel no slight or insult. Even when they ask why you are so fat or so short, something that coming from an adult would be painful, it will cause you to chuckle. You'll understand that they are just being curious about you and about words, and certainly not trying to put you down.

## *The impatience of children*

Some people think that children are too demanding, wanting everything immediately. But such people fail to see the

blessing inherent in a child's lack of patience. Children still live within a primordial state of innocence where when something good is promised it materialises immediately. Still inhabiting Eden, they know nothing of death or disease. In their world Mummy and Daddy will never leave them, never fight, and never divorce.

We may call this world an illusion, but we cannot fault children for having this outlook. Who says that the 'real' world is so superior? Often, when someone asks my advice about the person they are dating, I suggest that they observe whether or not they like children. If they show impatience, this not only reflects their self-centredness, but also suggests that they have little of the innocence required in a passionate relationship.

In marriage, most importantly, children also teach us how to love someone immutably and endlessly. We may feel annoyed with our children, proud or betrayed, but we can never stop loving them. Even the most selfish person can still put his child before himself, for when he looks his child in the eye he sees part of himself. Not to love his child would mean not to love himself. He won't see whether his child is fat or ugly, for it is still his own flesh.

Learning this lesson early is crucially important for married couples. Through our children we learn to focus on the unbreakable and unwavering affection that we feel for our spouse. It is fair to say that most people, prior to having children, have never tasted of unconditional love. When a man looks upon his wife not just as the woman he loves but as the mother of his children, he begins to love her unconditionally, the way he loves the child whom he has created with her. He extrapolates beyond the unconditional love he feels for his children, and superimposes this on the source of their life, his beautiful bride. Similarly, when a women looks at her baby she sees her husband's features endearingly reflected in their child's face, and her love for him is deepened. Together husband and wife have created something which is forever a statement of their continuing love for each other. The ancient Rabbis say that the Bible's pronouncement of the love between husband and wife making them into one flesh finds its literal realisation in the birth of a child, which is the actual fusion of man and woman. Far from hampering the romantic love between parents who wish to be lovers, our children immeasurably enhance it.

## 7

# Do the children come first?

*Kath: Can he be present at the birth of his child?*
*Ed: It's all any reasonable child can expect if the dad is present at the conception.*

**Joe Orton, *Entertaining Mr Sloan***

*I always wanted to spend more time with my kids. Then one day I did.*

**Anonymous**

At least twice a year my wife and I try to get away alone, without the children, even just for a weekend or a few days. Having no family in the UK, however, we are forced to have a friend or an au pair look after our six young children while we are away. This scandalises my more religious friends. How could we leave the children with strangers? Some would even ask, how could we leave the children at all? They are obsessed with putting the children first, and I know of many mothers who pride themselves on having never left their children in the care of a babysitter. They'd rather die than do what we do.

## *Marital love comes first*

I believe, however, that they are making a mistake born of a misconception of what contribution parents are meant to make to the lives of their children. Parents, and not children, must always come first in marriage. Children should not be allowed to invade the private space of spouses as a couple. They should not come running into their parents' bedroom every five minutes and as a general rule should not sleep in their parents' bed. When children invade their parents' bedroom at night as a matter of habit, their bedroom ceases to be a love-chamber, becoming a family sitting room instead. Children must learn that their parents are related not only through having children together, but also through being husband and wife. It is imperative that the children know that Mummy and Daddy love each other deeply.

Couples who put their children before each other often feel that they are better parents. They think that their principal role is to give their children love, time, guidance, patience and security. Not surprisingly, they are also the parents who find that their children interfere with their role as lovers. But their marital exhaustion is to them a badge of pride. No doubt their aims are all part of the stew for the successful rearing of children. But to think that these aims are superior is a mistake.

### *Children most of all need optimism*

Ultimately, even if parents are the most loving and attentive in the whole world, even if they never leave their children's sight, their omnipotence will cease under their offspring's desire for the fawning love of a member of the opposite sex. Parental love is certainly essential in instilling confidence in children, but in the end it is not enough.

What parents must give their children above all else is *hope*, a sense of optimism and a belief that things really work in this world; that happiness, love, companionship, and friendship are not illusory, but achievable goals. And when children look at their parents, the best thing they can be given is a constant and living reminder that their parents' love for each other will one day be their lot as well. The most important thing that parents can give their children, therefore, is a stable marriage, so that they are given hope that one day they too will marry and be happy. This way, children look forward to life, rather than being afraid of growing up.

PART FIVE

# Kosher Sex: a Recipe

essor - Português - ITA.

## 1

# Jealousy

*He who loves without jealousy does not truly love.*
The Zohar, 13th century

*[After discovering his wife's infidelity] Bullaro felt for the first time in his marriage that Judith was no longer his . . . Though she was cheerful around the house . . . she seemed preoccupied with her private thoughts, and at night instead of going to bed with him she stayed up late reading . . . Suddenly and ironically, she was becoming the kind of woman he had long idealised in his fantasies – the daring, carefree, sexually liberated woman he had searched for . . .*
Gay Talese, *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, 1981

*The way to hold a husband is to keep him a little jealous; the way to lose him is to keep him a little more jealous.*
H. L. Mencken

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Some of my most interesting table conversations revolve around the issue of whether jealousy has a place in marriage. On the whole ours is a generation that views jealousy and possessiveness as weakness. Spouses say they must be able to taste freedom. Husbands, having always hated jealous wives, feel they must be able to flirt with whomever they like, even if they are always faithful. And a woman no longer looks admiringly at jealousy in her husband as a sign that he still loves her and wants her to be exclusively his. Many wives tell me they would get extremely angry if their husbands showed even the slightest hint of jealousy. They would see it as a sign that the marriage lacked trust.

## *Spouse are each other's possession*

But marriage is not about independence. Husbands and wives do indeed belong to each other. A husband and wife who are not somewhat jealous are doing each other a disservice. If you want to be free, then don't get married. If you do, don't expect your spouse to be above jealousy. To a limited extent, a husband should be policed by his wife. Men are easily distracted, and their sexual attention span is of especially short duration. As Dennis Prager says, 'A man's head is like a radar tower. It turns in the direction of every pair of legs that walk by.' He needs his wife to give him that look that tells him that his behaviour at the cocktail party is just not acceptable. A wife who is not jealous of her husband is not keeping him on the straight and narrow.

Similarly, if a woman feels that she can do as she pleases – go to the beach with her old boyfriend, go out to dinner with a colleague from work – and her husband couldn't give a toss, she will feel unloved. Her thoughts will not be 'Wow, Hal is so tolerant. Boy, am I lucky.' In her heart of hearts she will think, 'Why doesn't he care? Why isn't he more attached to me? Am I still desirable to him?'

Even Bertrand Russell, the pioneer of open marriage, had to admit that his contempt for the power of jealousy had been 'blinded by theory'. When his disillusioned wife came home pregnant by another man, he could not forgive her. In spite of his firm belief in the 'strength of a deep and permanent affection', her infidelity was too much for him. She had become a stranger to him, and he abandoned her. Their daughter, Kathleen Tait, pithily remarked, 'Calling jealousy deplorable had not freed them from it . . . both found it hard

to admit that the ideal had been destroyed by the old-fashioned evils of jealousy and infidelity.'

## *Jealousy rekindles the marital flame*

The BBC once asked me to debate against a writer on sex and relationships who was sharply critical of my views on marriage. When we both got on the air, she immediately attacked me: 'My sister and I were always jealous of each other. We were competitive throughout our lives and it completely ruined our relationship.' I replied, 'You cannot compare the watery love of sisters to the fiery love of marriage. Jealousy is damaging to the love of sisters because theirs is not a passionate relationship. Their relationship needs a calm, predictable love which never wavers. But the throes of jealousy to a limited degree are very necessary for the fiery nature of romantic love which thrives on occasionally having petrol thrown on the flames.'

Sometimes in life we only appreciate that which has been lost and rediscovered. And in marriage too we sometimes need to be reminded of the possible loss of those we hold most dear in order to appreciate them fully. The problem with every long-term relationship is that prolonged familiarity often makes us forget what our spouse truly means to us. When we harbour a limited fear of losing our spouse to someone they find might more charming, we are constantly mindful of just how precious they are, and we refrain from taking them for granted.

Moreover, in jealousy we are reminded of our spouse's attractiveness and desirability. Since we live with our spouse day in and day out, we often become immune to and forgetful of his or her charm. A man who lives with his wife often forgets to see the woman in her. But when he takes his wife and his best friend out to dinner, there is a moment at which his friend peers into the woman in his wife. It can be a small thing. Perhaps your wife bends over and her bra strap shows for just a second. But your friend catches that. Or he stares at her too intently or for just a moment too long. A husband must capture that moment, must see his wife's attractiveness through someone else's eyes, in order to be reminded of it.

## *The human condition*

The Zohar, Judaism's foremost work of mysticism, declares that the world is broken and man must try to repair it. Until God Himself adds the finishing touches to our imperfect world, there shall always be incompatible opposites, antithetical forces, which govern our lives and our universe. By nature, therefore, men and women are largely incompatible. Notwithstanding how loving and caring a couple may be, it is impossible for a man and a woman to understand each other completely. They will inevitably be pulled in different directions, destined to vacillate endlessly between love and boredom.

It is not healthy, nor natural, for marriages to settle into routines and patterns that are dull. To an extent, a slight volatility is necessary for a marriage, so that it flickers like a flame. And couples who don't have an occasional, pleasant earthquake will see their passion quickly dissipate into the quicksand of everyday routine. Marriage should be a constant wooing. A man becomes infatuated with a woman. She wisely refuses to submit easily and remains just outside his grasp. He now must have her, desiring to spend his life with her. And when he has finally won her, he quickly tires of her and looks for the next conquest. Along comes jealousy, reminding him that if he takes her for granted, she has the power to choose and that there are plenty of other people who are (more) interested in her, and the cycle begins again.

Unfortunately, while jealousy can play a vital role in recapturing the spark in marriage, the spouse who harbours the jealousy is bound to experience deep pain as well. As

we begin to recognise how our spouses are very desirable to members of the opposite sex, and how they too are naturally attracted to other men and women – commensurate with the degree to which we have neglected them – we cannot help but feel insecure. On what points can we not compete with the others who are interested?

In relation to this, Shere Hite made an important discovery in her research on male sexuality. The vast majority of men, she writes, do not marry the women to whom they feel sexually most attracted. They date women like this but end up marrying someone with whom they have more in common. They end up putting compatibility before attraction. When I interviewed her about this conclusion and asked her why, she said that it was just another example of patriarchal domination and that men want women whom they can control. But I think she ignored the constant unhappiness that being married to an obviously sexually attractive partner can entail. Men, with their natural competitive instinct, are afraid of not being good enough and often resist marrying a woman whom they feel they cannot possess completely. It is a feeling of inadequacy rather than patriarchy that motivates their choice.

## *The male response*

Erica Jong describes these tensions perceptively in *Fear of Flying* where Bennett, Isadora's husband, lacks fire in his soul and Isadora feels neglected and bored. However, this changes when he discovers that Isadora is interested in Adrian, an Englishman whom she meets at a conference: ' "That Englishman you were talking to . . . he was really crazy about you." . . . He was drawing me toward him and starting to undress me. I could tell he was turned on by the way Adrian had pursued me. So was I. We both made love to Adrian's spirit. Lucky Adrian.' Later, when Bennett finds Isadora in bed with Adrian after all, instead of becoming abusive, he jumps into bed and makes passionate love to her.

There are few things as sexy and rejuvenating to a marriage – yet also as deeply painful – as watching one's spouse become the object of desire to a member of the opposite sex. Husbands who have been devastated by their wives' infidelity have also been able to renew a very passionate sexual affair with them – if they decided to keep their marriage going. The solution is for jealousy and trust to coexist within the marriage. We must trust our spouse always to remain devoted to us and never to betray their marriage vows. Nevertheless, we must understand that this trust is based on their love for us, and not on the fact that they do not desire anyone else intrinsically, or that they are undesirable to others. Our spouse's fidelity is based on their *choice*, rather than on any lack of interest from elsewhere – which is why we must work to ensure that our marriages are always rich and passionate so that our spouse never feels the need to find excitement outside the matrimonial bed.

## 2

# Mystery

*The prettiest dresses are worn to be taken off.*
Jean Cocteau (1891–1963)

*Love ceases to be a pleasure when it ceases to be a secret.*
Aphra Behn

*The glory of the daughter of a king is found specifically in her inward beauty.*
Psalmist lyrics

I firmly support the Judaic belief in society maintaining differing gender roles for men and women. Don't get me wrong. I believe that women are just as capable as men, and that they should be whatever they most fancy – doctors and lawyers, presidents and prime ministers, corporate bosses and business consultants. Or full-time mothers and wives, if that's what they prefer. Judaism insists that every individual maximise their potential, and the ancient Rabbis even maintained that women had greater wisdom than men as well as a more intuitive and deeper spirituality.

But with society increasingly closing the gender gap, and with the stereotypical aggressiveness of the male role having become predominant for both women and men, I believe that the sexes are no longer as attracted to each other as they once were. Indeed, men and women are becoming indistinguishable from one another. They dress the same, discuss the same subjects, pursue the same careers. Today, there is little besides anatomical differences that throws a veil of mystery between man and woman.

## *The consequence of a loss of mystery*

This urge to harmonise the sexes is, I believe, an important reason for the high rate of divorce. It bores men and women. Without any readily appreciable difference they lose their interest in crossing the divide. Why bother to make sense of the opposite sex, if anatomy is the only difference and there is nothing to be gained from the different perspective of a male or a female? If mere compatibility is really more important than attraction, if passion for someone else adds so little to our lives, we might as well not struggle to redeem a dying marriage at all.

Because Judaism does not believe in this, the Rules of Judaism (preceding *The Rules* by Ellen Ferrie and Sherrie Schneider, a huge bestseller in the US and the UK) were designed towards realising the separateness of man and woman throughout the centuries. What men and women can give each other are their precious gifts of masculinity and feminity, which by far transcend mere physiological and anatomical differences. These rules insist that men and women dress differently, and pray separated by a divider called a 'mechitza', and that women never be thrust into positions of too great exposure which might rob them of their natural mystery.

## *The mystery of women*

The great attraction of a woman is specifically her mysterious and elusive properties, the part of her that no man can possess. The Talmud points out that anatomically, men are naturally revealed, while women are hidden. In the genital region, in men everything hangs out, while with women everything is naturally covered and out of sight. With men life is about external projection. With women it is about internal dignity. Any wife who allows herself to be treated as if she is owned by her husband runs the risk not only of compromising her dignity, but also of bringing boredom into her marriage. Playing hard to get is essential if we want to retain sexual passion.

This is why modesty is so central to sexual passion. Modesty invites fantasy. A man only wishes to undress a woman physically after he has undressed her mentally. Modest dress on the part of husband and wife, even in the privacy of the bedroom, ensures that the body always retains its erotic mystique. Sex that leaves room for fantasy and mystery never becomes tiresome. The mind is our only organ that invites and constructs endless possibilities.

In Judaism, things that are holy and special are always somewhat veiled. In the Synagogue, the Torah scrolls are housed in a chamber which is covered first by doors, then by a curtain, and then by an iron gate. When Moses first encounters the divine presence in the burning bush, the Bible records his first reaction as turning away his face. Modesty is the proper reaction to encountering something holy. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah records that every angel has six wings, two with which to fly, two with which to cover its face, and two to cover its feet. The body too must be covered up, unless it is time for sex. This ensures that when a wife does finally undress, her actions will invoke the necessary response in her husband.

Women are not Rabbis and do not serve in overtly public roles in orthodox Judaism because God has given them the beautiful gift of the feminine mystique that makes them the object of male desire. This mystique does not thrive in the spotlight, and so women are not accorded the spotlight in Jewish rituals and ceremonies. This arises from a belief that what women carry above all else is an innate feminine dignity which, unlike the male ego, does not necessitate, nor flourish through, being overly exposed. The Zohar says that this is what the great Biblical heroine Ruth meant when she asked Boaz why he had shown her recognition, when she was just a stranger to him. The way the verse should be interpreted is like this: how can you, Boaz, a man, claim to know me when I, Ruth, a woman, am ultimately unknowable? Do not patronise me by claiming to know me for I am forever mysterious.

## 3

# Romance

*It's most dangerous nowadays for a husband to pay attention to his wife in public. It always makes people think that he beats her when they're alone.*

Oscar Wilde

*There was once an English nymphomaniac. She simply had to have a man every six months.*

Anonymous

I once sat with nine sex and relationships experts and therapists at a BBC Radio discussion on Valentine's Day on the subject of romance and sex in marriage. The presenter went around the room asking each of us how we would define romance. There emerged a quizzical look on the faces of the participants. The question was greeted with a few inaudible mutterings about gestures that show love, like buying flowers or chocolate, but almost no one could actually define what romance is. No wonder the presenter then asked how it was possible that a room full of experts could not come up with a coherent definition. Try thinking what your definition would be.

### *Romance is altruism*

To me it is this: a romantic gesture is one where the only purpose is to make one's spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend feel unique. It is a totally non-utilitarian act, a gratuitous act of appreciation. A romantic, therefore, is someone for whom love is an end in itself rather than being a means to sex, or having some other purpose. An example of what is not romance is if a wife's birthday comes up and her husband produces (on request) a toaster-oven or a dishwasher as a gift. Since the husband's gesture addresses the practical and necessary components of their life together, the gift does not make her feel particularly loved.

But when a husband buys his wife perfume or, better, a beautiful piece of jewellery, he is manifesting his love because he buys her something that is non-essential and impractical. His buying her flowers can have only one purpose, and that is to tell her she is beautiful and unique. The statement he makes with this gesture is that simply making her happy is even more important than meeting the essentials of their survival and upkeep. Similarly, taking your wife to the supermarket to go shopping is not necessarily romantic. It's nice to do things together, but buying food is something you have to do anyway, with or without your wife. But stopping in the middle of one of the aisles to give her a kiss is romantic, since it is totally unnecessary. It even distracts you from your purpose of shopping. It is an act undertaken solely with the intention of showing your wife affection.

## *Modern romance*

On the same radio show described above, a young woman called to tell about a beautifully romantic experience she had had just an evening earlier. Her boyfriend of five days brought a dozen red roses to her home for Valentine's Day, with a card telling her she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He simply handed her the flowers and disappeared into the night. 'Can you imagine,' she said, 'he didn't even want anything back. He just wanted to tell me that he loved me. And then he went home.'

Immediately, all the men in the studio began laughing into

their microphones. 'How old are you?' one relationships expert asked. 'I'm 18 years old.' 'Well then,' he said, 'you can be forgiven for being so naive. He only gave you those flowers as an entry ticket into your knickers.' 'But he went home right afterwards,' she protested. 'Well just wait until tomorrow night when your parents are out,' came the response. Amazingly, all the males in the studio concurred.

I have since asked many single men what they thought about this girl. Sadly, they seem to agree overwhelmingly that most of their romantic gestures are calculated to get sex from a woman, even if they do love her. The prevalence of premarital sex has for them turned romance into a means to an end.

## *Marriage, romance's last stand*

But even if every romantic gesture a man makes might be construed as a mere inching of his way closer to sex, what if it is not? At the conclusion of each academic year, college balls are organised with tickets costing £140 per couple. What if a male student seriously loves a girl and asks her out romantically? How is she to discern that they are not concluding a tacit deal whereby she has to reciprocate at the end of the evening? The answer is that she can't, which is why many girls don't accept the invitations.

There is today only one romantic thing a man can do. And this is to ask a woman to be his wife. For when he does this he is showing her unequivocally that he wants nothing from her save to love her and take care of her for the length of her days. With the exception perhaps of the daughter of a multimillionaire, no woman in her right mind could attribute a proposal for marriage to any motivation other than true love.

Those who are already married can bring new romance into marriage by ensuring that a healthy percentage of their actions are designed solely to show their spouse how much they love and appreciate them. In a Jewish marriage, a husband tries to bring his wife flowers every Friday afternoon, on the eve of the Sabbath. And in an age where so much of one's private life is compromised in favour of work and career, husbands and wives must ensure that they go out to dinner together, reserve time for conversation or go the theatre once a week or, if they are very busy with children, at least once a fortnight. And on a daily basis, they should try to set aside at least 20 to 30 minutes for uninterrupted conversation about the unimportant parts of life. Just shoot the breeze together and show each other that you like spending quality time together, that you are there to listen to your spouse complaining about the world, and that the sound of their voice alone is enough to make you happy. Call your spouse from work, even for a moment or two, just to say that you were thinking of them, and that they are always on your mind.

## 4

# Depth

*Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarter?*

Booker T. Washington, an American Black, describing his freedom at the conclusion of the American Civil War

*It is he who has broken the bond of marriage – not I. I only break its bondage.*

Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

In the quotation above, a newly freed slave boy describes his and his fellow slaves' reaction to their realisation of the immense responsibility of freedom. Unlike animals, humans have the liberty to choose what they want to do with their existence. The sad indictment of our generation is that by and large we are throwing our lives away. You walk along the street, glance at the news-stands and the shallow news headlines, look around at the cinema canopies and some of the trash they are advertising, walk by expensive boutiques and watch people devoting their lives to clothes and fashion. And then it hits you. What has become of my life?

This is not holier-than-thou power play on my part. I can be just as shallow and materialistic as the next guy. But there is a big difference between loving money and living for work, loving power and living to dominate others, loving clothes and living to shop. You can't dedicate your whole existence to these pursuits. Increasingly, however, we seem to have less to live for and we dedicate our lives to the least worthy causes, and slowly the meaning in our lives recedes.

## *Living as strangers*

Surely the quality of our lives should be measured by the quality and quantity of our relationships. But, sadly, modern-day society displays a profound boredom with people. Being in human company is never enough and talking about life has become squalid. Instead, people need to be embellished in order to become interesting, and even then we can only speak to them while the radio is on, the TV playing, we're sitting in a movie together, or we're discussing some rubbish tabloid revelation about somebody else's life.

Take dating, for example. The typical way in which a couple will date these days is by taking each other out to the movies. Instead of talking to each other in order to get to know each other better, a couple will sit together, perhaps even hold hands, and have an artificial story – a concocted fantasy dreamt up in Hollywood – entertain them for hours. After sitting passively for two hours, with virtually no interaction, and watching other people speak on the screen in their stead, they will say what a wonderful time they have had together, and how close they have grown. He may still not know her name and they have barely exchanged five sentences. But that is not important, since they were together when they watched Arnold Schwarzenegger blow away bad guys and exclaim, '*Hasta la vista*, baby!'

But the same is happening with our friends. When I was a student at Rabbinical college and visited old friends, it irritated me no end that the people I visited thought of watching something on TV 'together' in order to catch up on old times. I would walk into the homes of good friends to be told, 'Shmuley, thank God you're here. Sit down straight away. The Dolphins are down by one touchdown at the bottom of the fourth quarter and they are now on

offence. Now we're now going to see Dan Marino come to life.' Now, I love American football as much as anybody. But I had come to catch up with old friends, not to catch up with our favourite football team.

## *Modern life has become speechless*

Today, we can no longer do without the immediate gratification of our senses. Husbands and wives end up speaking about subjects as wonderful as the plumber and the electrician, but rarely about their own personal lives. When they do, it is almost always about their problems. Furthermore, with four of five televisions blaring in the house you have to ask, when do couples ever get a chance to speak at all? The *International Herald Tribune* recently reported that the number one way in which Americans counteract feelings of sadness is by buying themselves a small gift. Shopping for petty, trifling objects can induce happiness and, conversely, when we lose them, it breaks our spirits. Even a scratch on our new car can make us as unhappy, God forbid, as a relative's illness.

We have made human life itself superficial and created a society wherein aesthetics and material wealth quantify the value of human life. As Masters and Johnson put it, 'Women who don't happen to have the physical attributes of a Jane Fonda, a Tina Turner, a fashion model, or a *Playboy* centrefold are apt to judge themselves harshly as far as their erotic allure goes, often translating this personal sense of body-image deficiency into tangible sexual behaviour patterns. In recent years, many males have been smitten with a similar malady – unless they literally can measure up to the physical appearance of Sylvester Stallone, Bubba Smith or Burt Reynolds, they also feel unattractive and thus somehow deficient as lovers. While there were undoubtedly some young men in the 1940s who desperately wanted a physique like Johnny Weissmuller's or Buster Crabbe's, the matter just didn't seem as inexorably linked to sexual appeal.'

This accounts for one of the strongest reasons why contemporary husbands and wives do not love each other as intensely as of old, and do not connect as closely, remaining strangers to each other. Their infinite depth as human beings is closed off to each other. We can pretend that relationships today are no different to those a century ago, and that people back then would have divorced just as much, had it not been so stigmatised. But are we really going to fool ourselves into believing that in an age when there was no television, when husbands and wives actually conversed much more with each other, they did not know each other better and feel more closely linked? Shallowness and superficiality are the scourge of marriage, destroying intimacy and passion by covering over the full colour and magnetism of the human soul.

This is why, in strengthening our marriages and relationships, we must focus on enlivening our personalities and ennobling our characters. Time was when a man, before going on a date, would memorise lines of poetry in order to impress the woman he loved. Today, he will put four hours into fixing his hair and matching his clothes. We must begin to focus more on depth of personality and assure that our deepest selves are at least as attractive as our outer body. In pursuit of this goal, spiritual values shared between two loving adults pull a couple together with something wholesome and eternal. Praying together, visiting someone lonely or disabled, even just visiting your respective grandmothers, makes you feel good about yourselves and about each other. Studying together and discussing important personal and religious issues brings out the full vibrancy and brilliance of the human spirit. We must seek to be as colourful on the inside as we are on the outside.

## *Three ways to hold on to life's preciousness*

Human life is infinitely precious and cannot be quantified, and in particular the beauty of life lies in its mystery. When a superficial world measures people by what they possess, and marriage and love become conduits to obtaining material possessions, then we have lost the preciousness of life.

- We must always involve the emotions when we have sex. When sex involves the emotions, it becomes a spiritual experience which penetrates the superficiality of the flesh in more ways than one. And because it is deep, it allows us to bond with our partner in a way that is satisfying and eternal. The true measure of emotional involvement in every relationship is commitment, because without it an emotion is a ghost, a disembodied spirit which haunts but never helps us. Avoid sex that will not lead to intimacy, or sexual practices that will leave you feeling empty afterwards.

- Modesty and innocence should always be present in sex. Sex is meant to feel good, and this means that first and foremost we must feel good about ourselves. Feeling compromised by a sexual encounter is hardly conducive to full mental and emotional engagement; neither will it allow us to open ourselves up fully in the next sexual encounter. Having sex outside a committed relationship cheapens us and abuses our capacity for intimate communion.

- Spirituality must be a central ingredient of a couple's married life. By introducing spiritual values of charity, generosity, kindness, caring and forgiveness into our relationships – as well as a love for children – we ensure that our souls are cared for as much as our bodies. While the bodies of two lovers will always remain separate, their souls have the capacity to rise above their division and fuse together as one. A shared and deep religious belief affords a couple a meaningful meeting point where they both can consecrate their love to a higher cause. Don't be afraid to invite God into your relationship as an equal partner.

## 5

# Friends and family

*In 1714, the Roman Catholic Church decided that men confessing the sin of fornication no longer had to supply the name of their partners, as the information was proving too much of a temptation for their confessors.*

K. S. Daly, *Sex, A Guide for the Bewildered*

Marriage is a struggle for most people, and a good marriage takes an inordinate amount of time, energy, and caring to make a success. In achieving our objective of having good marriages and kosher sex, we can use all the help we can get – in particular, advice from family and friends.

They afford us an external point of release whereby we can vent our frustration to someone who is not party to the marriage, when doing so directly with our spouse will not always be helpful to the relationship. Contrary to what sex gurus advocate about the need for unbridled openness and communication in marriage, there are many times when it is not healthy just to say what you think to your spouse, especially when you are angry or frustrated and will say things in a painful and undiplomatic way. Words are eternal and seldom forgotten.

I know that it was only the counsel of a wise Rabbi that enabled my wife and me to stay the course of a difficult engagement and eventually marry. Advice from parents to their married children – so long as it is willingly sought by the children rather than offered unilaterally – can be especially helpful since (1) parents are already experienced in marriage, and (2) husbands and wives usually seek to keep their marital problems private and are therefore reluctant to share them with a stranger, but will do so with a parent or other close family member.

## *Feeling too ashamed to give advice*

None the less, increasingly I am seeing that people are refraining from giving much-needed guidance to children, siblings, friends, and students, for fear of being labelled hypocrites. People feel that if they are divorced, or have a difficult marriage – if they do not feel themselves to be paragons of marital virtue – they have no right to counsel others as to how to behave in wedlock.

There is little wrong with this initial hesitancy. Inevitably, we all face dilemmas in which we fear speaking out for what's right, because we feel hypocritical as we don't always practise what we preach. The problem becomes more acute when people have a false and harmful feeling of guilt about mistakes they make in their marriages, and never seem to forgive themselves their errors. The result is that they give the impression of being constantly unhappy within marriage, when the truth is that they are disappointed with themselves.

Moments before I walked under the wedding canopy in Sydney, Australia, I went up to my mother and asked her to give me her blessing. She herself had had a very difficult marriage which ended in an acrimonious divorce after 13 years. She took me by the shoulders, and then, wiping tears from her eyes, she spoke words I shall never forget: 'Shmuley, remember when you were a little boy and heard all those fairy-tales about people living happily ever after? Well, they aren't just fairy-tales. It is perfectly within your power to be a fairy-tale husband and to have the perfect marriage. It simply isn't true what they say, that you have to fight with your wife, and every marriage involves struggle. Unhappiness isn't inevitable. Be the perfect husband,

and make your wife feel that she is the luckiest woman in the world.' These words, uttered to me by a woman who had endured a very painful marriage, but had never grown bitter or despondent, have helped me throughout my marriage.

## *Imperfection does not make one a hypocrite*

Perhaps it is soothing to hear of how everyone is a hypocrite. Reading of how great men fall removes the challenge from us to have to emulate their greatness. If everyone is guilty of transgression, than we have free licence to transgress ourselves.

In a famous critique of Christianity, Betrand Russell wrote that Christianity is guilty of believing that man can be perfect in an imperfect world; that personal salvation can precede world redemption. In a similar vein, I believe that our generation is guilty of believing that imperfect people cannot help to perfect the world. We assert both directly and indirectly that flawed individuals should remain distanced from public life; that the imperfect man should first fix himself up, and only then try help his community. We make imperfect people feel that they have no right to marry unless they first get counselling, and certainly, if a man has flaws he has no right to lecture others about right and wrong.

But a hypocrite is not someone who says one thing and practises another. This would mean that a man who finds it difficult to give charity has no right to encourage others to give, or even to declare that charity is virtuous, since he does not himself practise it fully. It would mean that those who lie cannot extol the virtues of truth, and those who are materialistic cannot praise the redeeming qualities of religion and spirituality, and those who inadvertently have a wandering eye cannot speak in favour of monogamy. The absurdity of this is selfevident. The majority of us are not hypocrites. Rather, we are imperfect.

### *What we must aim for is sincerity*

In fact, a hypocrite is someone who does not believe what he affirms even while he is preaching it. We are hypocrites if we condemn anger while believing inwardly that only by intimidating one's employees can one get anything done. We are hypocrites if we extol the virtues of forgiveness but look upon as weak those who overlook slights. We are hypocrites if we commend honesty but look down at those who are silly enough to pay all their taxes; when we advocate the equality of all mankind but regard with contempt the underprivileged and the poor.

There are those great ones among us who really practise every single thing they preach. But our more realistic goal must be first, always to admit our mistakes and never to rationalise them; and second, to try to pursue what is right to the best of our ability. We are too hard on ourselves. What we should be seeking from ourselves is not perfection, but sincerity. Men and women are not perfect, and so long as they come humbly before their friends and family and admit errors of judgement or action, they should be accorded the full confidence of their loved ones. But they must also be sincere in their efforts to change.

### *It Takes a Village . . .*

Hillary Clinton's 1995 bestseller, *It Takes a Village*, was based around the premise that a whole society is responsible for the rearing of a child. The same is true of the nurturing of a healthy marriage. I know of almost no husband or wife who at one time or another has not needed family or friends to help them through some difficult times. We should not be afraid or ashamed either to seek or to offer advice. On

the contrary, we must remember that a healthy and happy marriage is essential to a healthy and happy life. And healthy and happy individual members of society lead to a healthy and happy society.

Every community is responsible for offering newlywed couples the support and love they need until this couple too will be ready to assist newlywed couples in their own time. It is for this reason that in the Jewish religion, a couple do not go on honeymoon the morning after their marriage. Rather, for one full week after the wedding, a young bride and groom are entertained by their community to seven days and nights of festivities, demonstrating the support, nurturing, and assistance of the entire community. The young couple are not castaways, all alone in their newly married life.

I remember, when I first got engaged, and was plagued by all the usual doubts that accompany the big plunge into commitment and marriage, a Rabbi with whom I was friendly from Sydney, Australia, saw me walking across the street in New York. With callous disregard for his own safety, he charged across the street, ran up to me, and gave me a big hug. 'Congratulations,' he said, 'I just heard about your engagement. You are the luckiest man in the world. I worked with your fiancée when we were both teachers at a Jewish school in Sydney. She is the most amazing girl. I hope that my own children will one day find someone of such high calibre.' He gave me another hug, and ran off. I remember thinking to myself, indeed, how lucky I was, and this helped to dispel my feelings of anxiety and melancholy. I also remember thinking what an amazing man he was, a truly righteous individual. One day, when one of his children marries, I hope to be able to reciprocate this kindest of gestures.

# The Final Word

## CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

A friend of mine called me and asked if I'd join him for a whisky. I extend my free-dinner policy to never turning down an offer of a whisky – especially a single malt – so we went to a local pub together. He began telling me how hard married life had been of late. He had been married for 23 years, and it had never been easy. 'We've always had a bumpy ride, but lately it's been a terrible storm. I no longer think that the marriage can survive. We do nothing but argue. We're both miserable. We're now talking seriously about divorce and I'm seeing a solicitor this week.'

I was sad to hear his words. They had three children to think of, and I knew that he loved his wife. I reminded him that as director of a Jewish organisation that specialises in public speakers, I am fortunate to hear about a hundred charismatic speakers a year on subjects as diverse as the Middle East conflict and the inspiration behind cartoon superheroes. Some speeches are movingly memorable. Others are instantly forgettable. And occasionally a speaker will employ such a fantastic one-liner that one remembers it verbatim.

Such was the case with the American Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Admiral William Crowe, when he addressed the L'Chaim Society at the Oxford Union in May 1994. Admiral Crowe spoke of the difficult times the world was enduring. But as a ray of hope, he said, 'At times like these it is important to remember that there have always been times like these.' That line struck a deep chord with me and it enriched my life. 'You've been through hard times before, and you never quit,' I told my friend. 'You've got to remember that you've been down this road previously and you came out married – and happy. Try to remember what got you over those earlier hurdles. Pick yourself up from your sense of defeat, and never let anything beat you.'

What distinguishes a period of mere marital difficulty from a time when you are actually heading towards a decision to divorce? Clearly it is this: marital difficulty is when you fight, but you believe that the arguments can be resolved and that happiness, or at least peace, can be restored to the marriage. Divorce is where you believe that the situation has deteriorated to the extent that it will never get any better and the relationship cannot be salvaged; that the two of you are incapable of achieving reconciliation.

In times like those it's important to remember that somewhere in your life you were in a situation where you seemed defeated: a friendship that couldn't be rescued, a business that couldn't be kept afloat, a school exam that couldn't be passed, an employer who couldn't be pacified, or a life that couldn't be saved. But you persevered and you pulled through, and you made it. The first remedy in the 'no hope' situation in the context of marriage is to remember that there always *is* hope. That human beings have an infinite capacity to renew themselves. That love is so much more powerful than hate. That sharing life with another life is infinitely more precious than going it alone. That even those who have divorced often remember far more of their loving moments together than of their misery or the pain they caused each other.

### *Success in life is not about victories but about perseverance*

Today we have very little appreciation for the quality of struggle. We want things to be smooth. When they aren't, we believe the situation to be inherently flawed. That is not the case. Success in life is not about victories, but about perseverance. The great man or woman is not he or she who triumphs, but rather he or she who never quits. Marriage is not about always feeling love. Rather, it is about never ceasing to care. Sometimes when you feel enormously hurt by your spouse, it is justifiable not to feel love. When you are hurt, you feel pain. It's OK not to feel affectionate toward your spouse then. But it's not OK to cease caring and abandon the struggle. A mountain-climber can feel fatigued. As he climbs the mountain, he may sometimes feel that he has no energy to climb any higher. He may feel that the mountain has defeated him. He is perfectly justified then in ceasing, for a while, to make progress. What he cannot do is cease to care and just let go.

Life is an uphill struggle. And as we climb we sometimes feel we have no more inspiration or desire to carry on. During moments like these we must remember that we've been there before. You've been demoralised before. You've felt defeated before. But you eventually triumphed. Just don't quit. Never abandon the struggle. Because, in the final analysis, life is not about conquering the mountain. Rather, the continuous climb is what existence is all about.

The mountain of life stretches on endlessly upward. There is no summit from which you can shout victory. Rather, the true measure of success is the distance you have traversed, moving painstakingly forward, never giving up. Not how high up you are, how happy your marriage is compared with other climbers and couples. You are not them and they are not you. The mountain upon which you climb is your mountain, it's your life. No one can measure how much baggage you were laden with before you began climbing. You may have a backpack weighing 80 pounds on your shoulders, while the Joneses next door, whose marital bliss you've always envied, started with a much lighter load.

In marriage it is far better to lose the argument and win back your partner. If you're going through a difficult patch,

or even if you're repeating one frequent argument, go back to your husband or wife. Say you're sorry. Hold them and tell them that they mean everything to you. They may have started the argument. In your heart you may believe, even be sure, that this time they are at fault. It doesn't matter. You go ahead and apologise. It is far better to be in love, to live in peace, than to be right. Go ahead and lose the argument and win back the relationship.

The earth will one day be inherited not by those who have reached the mountain's summit, but by those who have never fallen and never retreated.

Your marriage is not a facet of your life. It is your life. It is not a detail of your happiness, but its central source and your greatest blessing. There is enough uncontrollable pain in life without our gratuitously adding self-inflicted wounds. When you feel distanced from your spouse, swallow your pride. Go back to the person to whom you once committed your life and exert the energy to make the marriage work again.

If you can rekindle your affection, you will have the satisfaction of knowing not only that you never stopped climbing – that you never quit – but that you never climbed alone.

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# Checklist for Marriage

These questions might together serve as a checklist in establishing criteria for a healthy marriage. If the person you're dating meets at least 18 of the 23 criteria below – and whether the answer to each question should be 'yes' or 'no' will be obvious to you – and they are attractive to you, then what are you waiting for? Not everyone will be a shining example of all these standards. But so long as they demonstrate the capacity to learn and to better themselves, then they are good people and life-long-partner material.

- Do I find this person attractive?
- Is this a good person with a good heart?
- Do they appeal to me, not just aesthetically, but in a deep way, that will last well beyond the first wrinkle in their face?
- Do I respect them?
- Do they love children?
- Do they have the capacity to put other people before themselves and empathise with another person's plight?
- Are they charitable, not just in pocket, but in person?
- Are they non-judgemental?
- Do they live for something other than the material and transitory?
- Do they share my core values? And if not, do they at least harbour other fundamental core convictions?
- Are they humble or, at any rate, not arrogant?
- Are they responsive to my needs?
- Or do they always demand an explanation for the things that make me happy?

- When they hurt me, are they forthcoming with an apology?
- Are they slow rather than quick to anger?
- And if not, are they at least easily appeased?
- If I were asked to sum them up to my very best friend, would I describe them as a beautiful person, both inside and out?
- Do they show an understanding of the fact that the very definition of a relationship is the ability of two people to cater to each other's needs (even if they do not understand each other)?
- If I decided not to marry them, how would I feel if I heard that they had got engaged to someone else? Would this cause me unbearable pain?
- If they don't live up to the above standards, do they at least have the humility and capacity to learn?
- Do they admit their mistakes?
- After being told them by others?
- Or on their own?

I put attraction and affection at the top of the list because it would be absurd to suggest that someone contemplate marrying a person whom they do not esteem end treasure, and to whom they do not feel strongly drawn. Furthermore, there must be, in addition to love and emotional attraction, a very deep sexual attraction. Pure emotion is too ephemeral: if we marry for reasons of love alone, we have no way of knowing that in a year's time we will feel the way we feel now. Love is often based on compatibility or things shared in common. There must be present an almost irrational compulsion – an inner inexplicable magnet – which always pulls you towards your beloved. *Attraction* is key, and it is a lot more important even than compatibility. This is also the reason that, notwithstanding this checklist, the ultimate reason for one's attraction must remain elusive and mysterious. What brings a man and woman together is not what they have in common. Rather, attraction draws then towards each other *despite* what they *lack* in common. And attraction here is used holistically, to include both the body and, especially, the personality.

# Kosher Sex in a Nutshell

Kosher sex is carnal love that leads to knowledge and intimacy. Betrand Russell wrote in *Love, An Escape from Loneliness*, 'Civilised people cannot fully satisfy their sexual instinct without love. The instinct is not fully satisfied unless a man's whole being, mental quite as much as physical, enters into the relation.' Sex at its best, therefore, is an act of capitulation whereby two people allow themselves to be carried away to a promised land of familiarity and togetherness. Casual sex, by contrast, is where the two participants stand their ground in the wake of that tidal wave of positive emotion which sex calls forth, remaining rooted each in their own sphere.

Sex for pleasure is an end in itself. But kosher sex is a journey, whereby the fire of sexual attraction and sexual union in the bedroom leads to closeness and intimacy in life outside the bedroom. When sexual attraction is diminished within marriage, the marriage falters in other areas as well. As Masters and Johnson write, 'When things don't work well in the bedroom, they don't work well in the living room either.' Conversely, a man who is not attentive to his wife outside the bedroom cannot suddenly expect her to perform inside the bedroom. So, romance and love lead to sex, and kosher sex continues the cycle by engendering continued romance and love.

The purpose of sex is to unite two distinct bodies as one flesh, so that the intense, bonding experience a man and a woman share leaves them sewn together with emotional thread even after they separate. Movies today show people having great sex. Great sex makes you feel amazing and has you and your lover howling and swinging from the rafters of the ceilings. But kosher sex is measured not during the lovemaking itself, but the morning after, when you can't get your partner off your mind:

Great sex has you screaming the deity and your mother's name during the act. Kosher sex has you remembering your lover's name after the act.

Great sex has you focused entirely on the body of your partner. Kosher sex has you bound with the soul of your lover.

Great sex promotes physical exhilaration. Kosher sex leads to spiritual integration.

Great sex highlights the contours of the body. Kosher sex raises the personality up from the confines of the flesh.

Great sex satisfies a hormonal urge for sexual release. Kosher sex caters to a spiritual need for human transcendence and fusion with another soul.

Great sex consists entirely of *motions*. Kosher sex consists of motions that elicit lasting *emotions*.

Great sex is undertaken by two separate bodies, kosher sex by two halves of the same soul.

Great sex is making friction. Kosher sex is making love.

Great sex is a premeditated and calculated performance. Kosher sex is the total submission to instinct, freeing the individual of all inhibition.

Great sex is about the interaction of two bodies, kosher sex the integration of two souls.

Great sex leaves no trace. Kosher sex leaves no separation or space.

Great sex is measured while you're in bed together with your partner. Kosher sex is measured in the period thereafter, when you are physically apart but emotionally close.

Great sex can often have a man trying to remember the name of his partner from the night before. Kosher sex has a man asking the woman he loves to take his last name for ever more.

Great sex can need many new partners to sustain its passion. Kosher sex unearths deeper layers of the same partner, leading to replenishment and renewal.

After great sex we promptly fall asleep. After kosher sex we fall into each other's arms.

Great sex can be had even while all one's barriers and inhibitions are still up. Kosher sex is humans at their most vulnerable, when their defences are down and their hearts exposed.

Great sex is a performance, while kosher sex is an event.

Great sex is a form of sensual gratification. Kosher sex is the ultimate form of knowledge.

Great sex is a delight of the body. Kosher sex is a delight of the soul.

Great sex is an end to an encounter, while kosher sex is the beginning of a relationship.

Kosher sex is the solution to the modern dilemma of sex. As great as the lust for sex may be, the desire for intimacy is still greater. Kosher sex is the kind of sex that caters to this need, because it leads to intimacy. Kosher sex is passion born of romance. It provides what the Bible proclaims: 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and leave his mother. He shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall become one flesh.'

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Has your sex life lost its spice? Does it take longer to make a cup of coffee than to make love to your partner? Has 'the headache' become part of your nightly routine? Is the TV the only thing you manage to turn on in your bedroom?

*Kosher Sex* will put the passion back into your love life, along with a deep and satisfying intimacy. Drawing on Jewish wisdom, Shmuley Boteach breaks down sexual taboos, demolishes myths and argues that we need to understand the hidden power of sex in order to enjoy both intimacy and passionate lovemaking.

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- **Should you ever refuse sex?**
- **Is oral sex kosher?**
- **Should you make love with the lights on?**
- **How can you keep the fire of passion burning bright?**

Kosher sex unites lovers' souls as well as their bodies, making attraction only stronger with time. This is because kosher sex makes lovemaking a journey rather than a destination.

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is Director of the L'Chaim Society and has rapidly become a leading international relationship guru. He appears frequently on TV and radio and is author of *The Jewish Guide to Adultery* and *Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments*. He lives in London with his wife, Debbie, and their six children.

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